

Social Media Memorialising and the Public Death Event

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen Mary University of London

2017

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- Scott, S.A.Q. (2017). Mediatized witnessing and the ethical imperative of capture. *International Journal of E-Politics (IJEP)*, 8(1), pp.1-13. Available at: <https://www.igi-global.com/article/mediatized-witnessing-and-the-ethical-imperative-of-capture/176424>
- Scott, S.A.Q. (2016a). Algorithmic absolution: The case of catholic confessional apps. *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 11, pp.254-275. Available at: <http://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/23634>
- Scott, S.A.Q. (2016b). Building trauma narratives: Community dynamics in negotiating the sacred on YouTube. *Paper presented at the annual conference of the Media, Communications and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA)*, Canterbury, UK.
- Scott, S.A.Q. (2015). Public death and personal media: Performing grief online. *Proceedings of the 33rd Conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR): Sensing Religion*, Louvan-la-Neuve, Belgium.
- Scott, S.A.Q. (2014). On the rituals and symbols of digital mourning: The death of Neda Agha-Soltan. Paper presented at the annual conference of the International Association of Media and Communications Research (IAMCR). Hyderabad, India. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266201432>

Abstract

This thesis explores how participatory online rituals of mourning serve to mediate public death events that are collectively experienced as forms of social injustice, and the modes of collectivity they engender. I introduce the term Social Media Memorialising (SMM) to describe this phenomenon. The mediated deaths of SMM are experienced as a transgression of the sacred, and in the process reveal societies' constant negotiation with death, virtuality and memorialising online. SMM entails appropriating the processes of public mourning such that the means of symbolic production shifts away from media and political gatekeepers and towards networked publics.

In analysing SMM on YouTube, this thesis employs a mixed-methods research design premised upon a multimodal approach to discourse, system-network mapping, and thematic analysis. I present two case studies for comparative analysis: those of Neda Agha-Soltan in Tehran in 2009, and that of Lee Rigby in London in 2013. Both constitute emblematic examples of 'public death events': the death of individuals considered to be exceptional, morally significant, traumatic and worthy of public mourning and grief. This framework captures the complex forces involved in the mediation of death online, and the modalities and mechanisms of virtual space as ritual space.

SMM manifests through innovative, strategic and performative forms of grieving that hybridise online and offline practices, highlighting the conditions of the death event as integral to the modes of grieving that follow. What emerges is a platform-specific vernacular that reflects the form, function and terms of engagement for online grieving. SMM coalesces the commemorative with the performative, shaping both the social significance of the death event and the attitudes regarding the death and its causes.

Acknowledgements

To my boys Naïm and Léon, who were not yet of this world at the time I began, and to my father Patrick J. R. Scott, who left before I finished yet is present on every page.

I am forever indebted to Dr Yasmin Ibrahim for her support, belief, and uncompromising standards. The trust and patience provided by Dr Mathew Purver as I navigated my way between disciplines has been invaluable. Thanks are also due to Dr Antonios Kanadiakos for his insightful comments and suggestions. It is a great privilege to have had such an accomplished and supportive supervisory panel.

To my friends on the Media and Arts Technology journey. A problem shared, after all.

I thank my siblings for keeping me grounded, and my mother for giving me both the thirst for knowledge to start something like this, and the stubborn resilience needed to finish it.

To Julie.

This work was supported by the Media and Arts Technology programme, EPSRC Doctoral Training Centre EP/G03723X/1.

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Abbreviated terms

API Application Programming Interface

BTL Below The Line

EDL English Defence League

GUI Graphic User Interface

MDA Multimodal Discourse Analysis

SMM Social Media Memorialising

SNS Social Network Site

UGC User Generated Content

URL Uniform Resource Locator

Note on transcriptions and sources

All quotations and transcriptions derived from online content appear exactly as they do in the original. Any additions or alterations (including ellipses, punctuation or clarifying notes), appear in square brackets. I have refrained from using the normal ‘[sic]’ for reasons of clarity due to the sheer number of irregularities in the text. Direct quotations from online sources are listed in the bibliography, and a full catalogue of referenced YouTube videos is contained in appendices I and J.

Chapter 1

Introduction: death, media and memorialisation

There are few elements of modern life that remain free from the touch of digital media, and death is no different. Where modernity institutionalised death and removed it from sight, in the network society death is everywhere: on the news, in the movies, and across the diverse social spaces of the internet. Digital media connect: people, places, ideas and content. They also amplify: experience, emotion, speed and scale. A distant death, in shocking circumstances and on the far side of the earth, can become elevated to the scale of a global media event in minutes and hours. Our smart devices, broadcast media and digital networks combine in bringing these deaths closer than ever before, creating new cultures and practices around death. Death, particularly that which is violent, shocking or unexpected, can cause a rupture to our sense of community, identity and security. Conversely, death can also come to clarify meaning, causing a distillation of what we hold worth living for. As such, the manner in which we react to death reflects our normative values and belief systems. In response to these observations, this thesis presents an account of the mass-participation

online mourning rituals that follow traumatic death events. I offer the term *Social Media Memorialising* (SMM) to capture this. It is my contention that as an emergent cultural practice, SMM reflects something important and original about what it is to be human in today's world. In the following pages I will set out my argument why.

Despite a proliferation of interest in the impact of technology on human society, death and the digital remain an under-researched pairing. This thesis is not a study of memorial-specific websites, nor is it a study of media audiences. Instead, it is an account of how traditionally understood audiences are now interactive, participatory agents within media events, and how any online space can become a space for public memorialising. The public memorialisation of selective individuals has long been a powerful symbolic resource held by elite political and media gatekeepers, used to rouse emotions, communicate a political narrative, and shape social memory in the longer term. These dynamics and resources are now changing in terms of access and control.

The central argument of this thesis is that SMM constitutes an *appropriation of the process of public mourning*, whereby the means of symbolic production have shifted in control and influence towards networked publics. This shift is not absolute, and neither is it entirely stable, but it is significant and it looks to be enduring too. Public memorialising represents the real-time negotiation and contestation of meaning, of that which is felt to be of moral significance, which now begins in the immediate aftermath of trauma. This thesis shows how the dead are mediated through novel, powerful and creative social forms of grieving that are a hybrid of offline and online practices. I argue that SMM forms a *networked communion of grief*, a group temporarily bound by mediated events and their emotional reaction to them. These findings have major implications for the type of world we are inadvertently creating for ourselves, for they do not just represent a democratisation of mourning practices, but of political expression itself.

The individuals separated out for mourning by a society are removed from their lived realities and abstracted into the most rhetorical of benedictions. As symbolic constructions, they channel powerful collective human emotions and carry the power to influence individual and collective thinking across the socio-political spectrum. At its heart then, this thesis is an examination of power. This thesis shows that SMM is much more than a historical recording of events, and instead constitute symbolic renderings that reconstruct and reimagine them. It is for this reason that the appropriation of public mourning is so significant, as SMM represents the ability of networks to undermine the entrenched power of hierarchies: a shift in control from the gatekeepers of old toward a networked public. This has been observed by some of the most influential scholars of our time, particularly the enduring legacy of Manuel Castells (2007; 2010; 2012). Accordingly, this thesis is an examination of the processes of communication that form and determine these relationships of power and influence. Thus conceptualised, my understanding of the workings of SMM is heavily influenced by the writings of Norman Fairclough (1992) and his approach to the analysis of communication as a means with which to investigate social and cultural change. My approach of multimodality also draws legitimacy from Fairclough's insistence that we include all those symbolic forms that are at play in a given context in the study of discourse, without limit to text or language (*ibid.*, 1992, p.4). So whilst the minutia of this study is limited in its discussion to two death events, it is these larger questions of society, symbolic communication, and power that are of real concern.

1.1 Location and premise of research

On 23 September 2015, the world was gripped by pictures showing a small child lying dead on a Turkish beach. Aylan Kurdi was just three years old and fleeing the war in Syria when the boat he was crossing to Europe in sank

in the Aegean sea. As the story broke across international news, social media brought images of Aylan to the screens of almost 20 million people in the space of just 12 hours (Vis & Goriunova, 2015), and as they consumed these images, so people responded. Artists created visual tributes that dominated social feeds; Facebook sites were created in memory; #IAmAylanKurdi trended on Twitter; and memorial videos proliferated on YouTube.¹ For a short time, the death of one small boy raised fundamental questions about the societies we want to live in and the norms that underpin them. This thesis examines how deaths like that of Aylan Kurdi are memorialised online, and why.

Death is a shared experience that needs to be told. From the gathering in places of worship, to funeral processions, and the obituary pages of newspapers, spreading the news is the first step in the process of making sense of events. To share and display our grief is instinctive, reflexive, affective, deeply personal and inherently social. My interest here is not in questions of personal loss, but rather in death that is experienced collectively and which, through cultural actions, becomes a *public death*: seen as exceptional, morally significant, traumatic and worthy of public mourning and grief (Sumiala, 2014b).² These deaths do not concern people we have met, and our experience is not analogous to that of personal grieving. They are *mediated*, in every sense of the word, and that mediation acts upon both the event and its meaning. They cannot be separated from the media ecology in which they exist, which drives their effect and, in turn, participation online.

These types of highly politicised public death events are, unfortunately, nothing new. However, the emergence of mass-participatory online responses is. Questioning why we are moved to respond in this way, to which deaths, and what role this might be playing for both individuals and the collective, is multi-faceted.

¹A YouTube search for ‘Aylan Kurdi Tribute’ returned over 3,000 entries on April 11th, 2017.

²My use of the term ‘public’ here is broad. It refers to an audience in one sense (as both spectators and witnesses), but also to a community, a socialised body, and as such it infers a sense of shared civic interest (Habermas, 1992).

Any answers will be found far beyond simple observations of technology's ability to increase the scale and reach of our voices. We must question how we witness the deaths of others in the media, the visual rendering of the dead through media, how and what types of collectivity this might generate, and to what effect. SMM formulates in accessible, participatory spaces, sacralising the mundane as it does so. Barriers of time and space are collapsed, creating an open-ended process. The social hierarchy of elite actors from religious or political society is absent and rendered largely obsolete. Participation is actively encouraged, as is creative and innovative input. Traditional scripts are replaced by vernacular ones. All this takes place on platforms where a multitude of other processes are occurring simultaneously. In short, SMM represents an altered and evolving form of memorialising.

This conception of SMM is:

- Located in a conceptual framework comprising public death and memorialisation (Butler, 2004; Doss, 2008; Santino, 2004, 2006; Scott, 2017; Sumiala, 2014a), media events theory and visual culture (Couldry, 2003; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Ibrahim, 2012b), and online memorialising (Carroll & Landry, 2010; Gibbs et al., 2014, 2015; Knudsen & Stage, 2013; Knudsen, 2016).
- Proceeds from an interpretive, social constructionist perspective of the social world.
- Is focused on the mediation of death (and the dead) online, the forms of commemorative practices engendered, and the role of the online space upon this.

The study bridges three thematic areas, each of which have strengths and weaknesses as explanatory tools. First, the notion of public death highlights the role of memorialisation in modern society, why it happens and to whose benefit,

and how we define death as grievable and worthy of public commemoration. However, the literature regularly falls into the trap of framing ‘the public’ as overly passive and compliant. Traditional forms of memorialisation and media representation are *for* the public, not *of* the public. SMM sits in stark contrast. Second, the conceptualisation of SMM presented here draws heavily from media events theory (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Katz & Liebes, 2007) and moves it forward into the realm of social media. These are *disruptive media events* that wrest control of media narratives from the establishment in unexpected and unpredictable ways. Third, online memorial practices (in combination with wider accounts of digital culture) serve to illustrate the motivations for SMM. The powerful emotional and social feedback users get from online interactions can be hugely cathartic in times of trauma, loss and grief, affording outlets that simply were not present until recently. The lower transactional costs of social media provide solidarity and support free from the emotional and logistical features of co-present communications. Drawing from recent studies, I use the notion of the *platform vernacular* as an explanatory frame for the forms of everyday media practice observable in SMM (Gibbs et al., 2015).

The phenomenon identified as SMM has been discussed before, but it has not been formally defined or approached explicitly as ritual. It is here that this study breaks new ground. Ritual theory locates the actions, motivations and attitudes of participants in a rich conceptual setting with huge potential for moving theory forward into the digital realm. Whilst traditional rituals usually follow strict norms, the online space is defined by its *intertextuality* and *multimodality*. There is, therefore, a fluidity and constant evolution to SMM, mediated by technological platforms, and premised on the sharing of content. A Social Network Site (SNS)³ is never just one thing for one person - it is a homepage, an advertising space, a meeting place, a conversation, a performance and more - yet the space is ordered, bound and restrictive: terms and condi-

³I use the definition as laid out by Boyd & Ellison (2007). See appendix A: Glossary of terms, for a full description.

tions of behaviour and content are policed by the site’s administrator (or more often by its algorithms; see Gillespie, 2014), community standards of behaviour are negotiated and self-enforced (explicitly or otherwise) and, most importantly, communicative acts are restricted by the structural affordances of the platform. We must also account for the hidden hand of media architecture driving and defining popularity, focusing gaze on privileged objects and individuals, and evaluating relevance, whilst ultimately being driven by commercial aims. The rituals that take place on these platforms are no longer set apart as sacred and protected by the normative terms of death and funeral rites of old, and this has profound implications for how we are to understand them. What does it mean, for example, to ‘like’ or ‘dislike’ a memorial video? Whilst our voice has a larger potential audience than ever before, our semiotic vocabulary can never have been so restricted. Yet there is a social agency in these platforms that shapes them as cultural tools to the ordinary user’s will, performing functions and convening like-minded people in ways quite distinct from the developer’s original thinking. Chapter two expands on these ideas in full.

There are several small points concerning terminology that it is important to make clear from the outset. First, the public death event as I describe it here sits in distinction from the socialised responses to celebrity deaths that have recently become such a common occurrence. Whilst a closely related phenomenon, the celebrity death event captures the media gaze primarily because of what has been achieved in *life*, whereas the public death event explicitly concerns the injustice conditions of *death*.⁴ Second, distinctions between *online* and *offline* aspects of life might by now appear rather naïve. However, in terms of analytical and narrative clarity they contain useful distinctions and remain important semantic tools. Christine Hine (2015) uses the term the ‘E3 Internet’: as embedded, embodied, and everyday, which captures this question nicely. Third, and before I am damned for my reductive generalisations about the modern world, the final point concerns cultural perspectives. Whilst this thesis covers events

⁴This line of thinking is expanded upon in chapter 2 (section 2).

and actors from a global context, it is largely restricted to the English language. I write from the self-aware perspective of a British male in an advanced society, so when I use the pronoun ‘we’, I am doing so in full awareness of its location and limitations. Accordingly, I use it (sparingly and conscientiously) as an invocation of a generalised Western spectatorship and associated sensibilities.

1.1.1 Research questions

In response to these opening observations, this thesis sets out to investigate *how social media memorialising functions as a cultural mechanism in response to public death events*. As is explained over the following pages, my case studies are of YouTube. In order to address this in terms that are answerable on the basis of the evidence gathered, analysed and critiqued within the parameters of the study, this question is broken down into three parts:

- *What is the vernacular of SMM on YouTube, and how does this impact the public death as a sociocultural event?*
- *What are the platform-specific affordances and limitations for the operation of SMM on YouTube, and how does this add to the wider theorisation of ritual online?*
- *How should we understand the forms of collective engagement observable in SMM, what are their characteristics, and how might this explain the motivation for participation?*

1.2 Methodological rationale

This research is designed in the broad tradition of media anthropology. As Comen and Rothenbuhler explain: ‘Media anthropology attempts to tease out

layers of meaning through observation of and engagement with the everyday situations in which media are consumed, the practices by which media are interpreted, and the use to which media are put' (2005, p.2). The field of media anthropology is theoretically diverse, often using ethnographic tools to study content as well as the producers and consumers of media themselves.⁵ Johanna Sumiala describes media anthropology as:

an approach that is interested in media, first, as a shared symbolic system that constructs, organises and shapes the social reality around us, and second, that provides individuals with various opportunities to contribute to the construction of that social reality. (2013, p.3)

I also proceed from a sociotechnical perspective that understands communication to be shaped by both human agents and the technical architecture. This informs and defines what kind of interactions might be possible (see Rieder, 2016; Langlois, 2008).⁶

As will become increasingly apparent, this thesis bridges disciplines in terms of both theory and methods. I have been supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), as an interdisciplinary project between the schools of Business and Management and Computer Science. I am a communications scholar by trade, but I am fascinated by the insights and opportunities offered by data analytics. I believe most strongly that both fields will benefit immeasurably as the distance between them diminishes. However, at the time of writing they are two highly distinctive fields with separate histories and traditions. This is a dialectic tension that plays out across the pages of this thesis. I believe it to be one of the most fundamental strengths of insights

⁵In their edited volume *Media Anthropology*, Rothenbuhler and Comen explain that media anthropology moves the static field of media studies into a much more complete and multidimensional engagement that acknowledges the central role of media in modern value systems. They claim that media anthropology exposes the 'symbolic construction of reality and the fundamental importance of symbolic structures, myth and ritual in everyday life' (2005, p.1).

⁶This term reflects the mix of architecture and use, so think for example of Facebook's Like buttons, Twitter's 140 character limit, Pinterest's image driven system, YouTube's 'last-first' organisation of content, Instagram's bias towards certain hardware, Ask.fm's question and answer format. These are sociotechnical elements that define the sense of ordered chaos unique to each platform.

gained, particularly due to the cumulative building and reinforcing of arguments that is a result of a mixed methodology that feeds back and informs itself and the underlying theory. However, it must also be acknowledged that not everyone will be convinced of the same. As such, I tread lightly and sensitively, paying due respect to each tradition whilst endeavouring to move both forward. In order to remain coherent, it is necessary to first lay the theoretical groundwork that conceptualises this research as a media anthropology. From this point, the incorporation of data analytic techniques becomes another tool in the anthropologist's toolkit, rather than an incompatible or incoherent conjunction of approaches.

1.2.1 SMM and ritual

The work of Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) is an unavoidable reference point for any account of ritual. My position is both neo-Durkheimian and anti-functionalist, both of which require a brief explanation. Durkheim approached ritual as symbolic communication, and as that which connected the individual to society through the construction of shared experience.⁷ In the seminal *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1976), Durkheim states that ritual is nothing less than 'society in action': the means through which social solidarity is created, secured and reaffirmed. However, this should not be seen as absolute or predetermined, and as such a neo-Durkheimian approach rejects the notion that ritual *automatically* constructs or constitutes a community or social order. I am more aligned to Randall Collins (2004), who argues that we should re-cast 'society' as nothing more complex than the sum of bodies congregated at any time.⁸ As such, the 'collective consciousness' of ritual need not be all

⁷The Durkheimian legacy runs through many of the most important work on media and ritual over the last 30 years, from Dayan and Katz's *Media Events* (1992) to Nick Couldry's *Media Ritual* (2003), yet it can be a problematic legacy and requires some qualification from the outset.

⁸Collins' work shows Durkheim to retain a wonderful relevance for the exploration of how local, ephemeral, even mutually conflicting groups operate Goffman (1967) goes as far as saying that 'society' only exists as much as people in face-to-face interaction enact it.

encompassing, but contingent and localised. To be anti-functionalist is really to reiterate this point, and I follow Couldry's (2005) approach to media ritual that opposes any form of essentialist thinking about society as either entirely structural or entirely chaotic. I therefore move away from the pursuit and classification of community and solidarity as an assumed function *of* ritual, and instead focus on the negotiation, communication and contestation of symbolic forms *within* ritual.

Although religion is at the heart of Durkheimian theory, there is nothing new or controversial in applying his theory outside the religious frame (Alexander et al., 2006; Alexander, 2013; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Cottle, 2006; Couldry, 2003; Giesen, 2006; Lynch, 2012a,b; Sumiala, 2013). For Durkheim, religion is not so much an ontological belief but a 'unified *system of belief* and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community' (1976, p.44, emphasis added).⁹ Thus, Durkheim's enduring significance is found in the observation that it was not economics, technology or demographics that drove social life, but instead the *sacred meanings that societies assigned to these things* (Lynch, 2012b, p.22). Durkheim makes two essential claims that inform the interpretation of ritual here: First, that the systems of symbolic classifications used to make sense of the world around us are based on *emotionally driven* distinctions between the *sacred* and *profane* in society; and second, that the *sacred* thus defined (and the profane necessarily constructed in its opposition) plays a central role in the constitution and maintenance of a *shared moral sentiment* within a social group. As Jeffrey Alexander (2011, p.3) explains in his neo-Durkheimian analysis of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, 'at the core of social meanings are binary codes that categorise things in moral terms, as good and bad, as pure-sacred and as polluted-profane'. Within this framework, ritual is understood as *performative*, whereby it helps bring about that which it describes; ritual is *communicative*,

⁹Durkheim's moral community was named a Church, but in dispensing with that particular label we can retain his most important insights (Lynch, 2012b, p.23)

inasmuch as it manifests in episodes of repeated and simplified stereotypical acts; and ritual is *emotionally driven*, prioritising the phatic over the factual.¹⁰

1.2.2 Comparative case studies

This study is based on a comparative case study design, chosen for its ability to reveal similar features of larger-class phenomenon (Gerring, 2004; Yin, 2009). The first case is that of Neda Agha-Soltan. In Tehran on the 20 June 2009, Neda was inadvertently caught up in a demonstration decrying the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. She was shot through the heart by a Basiji sniper, and died within seconds on the street where she fell. Within hours, a 47-second video appeared on YouTube depicting the moment of Neda's death. The scene is chaotic; there are muted shots in the background, the screams of bystanders, fear in the voices.¹¹ In the hours that followed, Neda's story went viral and held the media's attention. In the aftermath, her death was hailed as the most widely witnessed in human history (Mahr, 2009). As the local regime banned any public or private mourning for Neda, people turned to the online spaces that were beyond the control of the government. It is well documented that the Iranian protests of 2009 marked a significant moment in the use of social media in political protests.¹² This intensely political activity was interwoven with the public commemoration of Neda's death, where grief and protest became a dual articulation. Neda's image was reproduced in thousands of YouTube videos, social media posts, and across rolling news channels. Through processes of mediation and ritualisation, Neda's likeness became both fetishised and politicised, moving into the realm of pop-cultural iconography. YouTube, as the site of the

¹⁰In the coming chapters I shall be building on this theory of ritual, drawing on the likes of Alexander (2004); Alexander et al. (2006); Bell (1992); Bellah (2005) and Turner (1969) to reinforce my thinking and explain why this triad is even more important when ritual comes together with media, and the co-present conjugation of bodies is removed from the equation.

¹¹The next day a second video, this only 37 seconds long, was posted by another bystander who rushed to her aid, his friend having filmed the scene.

¹²See Morozov (2011). This is discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

original testimony to Neda's brutal murder, became a storehouse for a vast plurality of memorial tributes.

The second case study concerns fusilier Lee Rigby, an off-duty British soldier murdered on a busy street in Woolwich, South London, on 22 May 2013. As he returned to the military barracks where he was based, Rigby was run down by a speeding car. Two young men, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebawale, then got out of the vehicle, dragged Rigby into the centre of the road, and attacked him with knives in an attempt to decapitate his lifeless body. The murder was an ideological one: 'We want to start a war in London tonight' bystander Ingrid Loyau-Kennet recalled being told by one of the attackers (quoted in Duffin, 2013). In contrast to the accidental recording of Neda's death, this attack was designed for its symbolic value, and intended to be as visible as possible. As Sunder Katwala (2013) explained, 'the killers would seem to have an unfortunately strong intuitive grasp of our modern media culture.' The men made no attempt to escape the scene of the crime, and instead actively sought out the cameras of witnesses: 'take my picture' one reported them as saying (Pettifor & Lines, 2013). The 'confessional' monologue of Adebolajo to camera was executed in an almost professional manner. Approximately 15 minutes after the initial attack, armed police arrived on the scene. The two men charged at the police, brandishing knives, a cleaver and a handgun. They were both shot and wounded before being arrested. Whilst social media were awash with reports and certain Facebook pages became particularly important, it was again YouTube where the most creative, explicit and diverse forms of SMM occurred.

Both of these cases constitute public death events. They beg the question why do *these* deaths resonate so strongly? Why did they dominate our news bulletins, newspapers and social feeds? I argue that the nature of these deaths – the conditions of capture in combination with the narratives of social injustice they carry – say something profound about our understanding of what it is to be human. Our responses to these deaths signal a profane desecration of sacred

notions: the right to life, personal freedom, nationhood, human rights and the protection of the innocent and vulnerable. The circumstances of death are a desecration of our most basic right: to be safe on the streets of our homes. Yet these particular victims represent more, heavy as they are with cultural symbolism: one the innocent, strong, brave and beautiful woman standing up against the corrupt, archaic, theocratic regime; the other the wholesome, courageous, pure hero-soldier donning uniform to protect his homeland with his life. The fact that the reality does not always correlate with the narrative is a different question.

Both of these case studies are limited to incidents of SMM on the YouTube platform. YouTube is a social media giant with a monthly user base of more than 1 billion people. It is open, easy to use, and firmly established as a go-to resource across the globe. It reflects Web 2.0 culture directly because User Generated Content (UGC) remains front and centre of the user experience.¹³ It also ensures like-for-like data between the cases, limiting the number of variables and strengthening the conclusions that could be drawn from the results.

As a point of clarity, I follow Adami (2009) in employing the term *(You)Tuber* throughout this thesis in reference to the various actors consuming and producing content. This is preferred to the narrower ‘user’ because it conveys platform specificity. It also references how every individual actively contributes to the wider ecology of YouTube. It is important to remember that the digital changes what constitutes participation and interaction: every time we view a video we create a data point to be fed into the ranking algorithm, adding in some small part to the state of constant change. Finally, I refer to the victims in contrasting terms: Neda by her first name, and Rigby by his last. This is simply a mirror of wider discursive practices, and reflects the hyper-personalisation of Neda and the military influence to Rigby’s story, as will become clear as the discussion builds.

¹³I use the definition of User Generated Content by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010). A full explanation is included in appendix A: Glossary of terms.

1.2.3 Digital methods

This research falls within the field of Digital Methods as defined by Richard Rogers (2013), with an emphasis on ‘following the medium’ to make allowances for the distinct ways in which the Web generates data and influences forms of interaction. Digital platforms (and particularly SNS) are in many ways meta-media: they are a convergence and repository of other media forms – video, audio, text, image, HTML, hyperlinks, etc. In addition to *remediating* content, SNS are an embedded form of *production* that is both human and computational. The basic ontology of a social network site consists of human-produced content (UGC) and computational architecture: the algorithms and scripts that organise, display and distribute content. From these observations, applying the label of Digital Methods to this research means both the inclusion of computational techniques and an account of the computational as an object of study in its own right.

Digital methods involve a mixing of approaches that have been digitised – ethnography, discourse analysis etc. – and those that are natively digital, such as recommendation systems, folksonomies and hyperlink analysis. The natively digital does not fit neatly into traditional distinctions of qualitative/quantitative or micro/macro analysis, but this is an opportunity, not a restriction. The digital realm moves away from the traditional demographic data of body politics (age, race, gender, education, income, class, etc.) and into questions of taste, sociality, performance, visibility, and interaction. Rogers calls this ‘post-demographic data’ (2013, p.154), covering the information we actively post, but also that which we don’t see online that connects us unknowingly to others who have occupied similar spaces. Digital methods involve going ‘beyond the screen’, realising that our questions can be better and our answers richer when we understand that the Graphic User Interface (GUI) is but a partial presentation of the computational world. What we can study is largely defined by what is accessible through the Application Program Interface (API). As such, my integration of digital methods includes the use of tools for accessing, assessing and

analysing data, and the incorporation of post-demographics into the analysis.

1.3 Research design

Having defined the phenomenon under investigation, located it in the relevant literature, and introduced the case studies, it is important to define how the research is operationalised. This methodology constitutes a mixed-methods design that combines:

- *A multimodal approach* to both context and data. Multimodality is not so much a *method for analysis* as a *domain of enquiry*, and as such there is no ‘off-the-shelf’ model to apply. The dominant line of thinking argues that operational frameworks should be developed in response to the research phenomenon (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; O’Halloran, 2009). Accordingly, my model draws from the Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Norris (2004), and the Social Semiotic approach of Kress (2009) and Jewitt (2009b).
- *‘Mapping the system’*. My approach to multimodality follows O’Halloran (2008) in understanding communication as being performed through contingent system choices. I therefore employ system-network mapping as a preliminary tool for describing the arrangement of communicative resources at play and the mechanisms through which they operate. This allows for YouTube to be conceptually mapped, identifying key areas of relevance for the targeted study (Van Leeuwen, 2009).
- *The use of Thematic Analysis (TA)* as the primary treatment of data. Multimodality does not contain a method for systematically organising the data, so I turn to TA (as best set out by Braun and Clarke 2006; 2012). TA is a means of engaging with the data that is both rigorous and methodical, and where there is no need for distinction between visual, audio and textual data at the level of coding.

- A *purposive sampling strategy* (Typical Case) was employed because it allows us to find representative instances of a particular type (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). After targeted data scraping from the YouTube API, further selection criteria were applied, with the final corpus being hand-selected.
- An *‘abductive’ approach to analysis* is employed in which existing theory is built upon and developed from direct engagement with the data in a continually reflective process (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p.200).

This is an investigative study, and the research methodology has been chosen to reflect and advance this modus. A mixed methods approach is not without problems, but it does contain the ability to simultaneously ask confirmatory and explanatory questions, therefore both verifying and generating theory (Marsh & Stoker, 2002). The approach set out here is not the traditional triangulation technique, whereby the application of one method is used to verify the results of another. Rather, this is a ‘value-added’ approach, where each element adds another layer of complexity and incrementally builds up meaning and understanding (Smelser, 1962). At times, the boundaries between the approaches become blurred, and much of the empirical work is folded back into the methods themselves in a dialectical and reflexive process. This is not a linear process, and it is premised on an interpretive, constructivist research ontology. It is also a highly tailored approach, developed in response to the research phenomenon and continuously refined in response to the investigation, as endorsed by the leading thinkers in the field of multimodality (Jewitt, 2009, 2013; Kress, 2009; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001; Norris, 2004; O’Halloran, 2009). These arguments are elaborated on and strengthened in chapter three. As a result of all this, the research design is complex; it does not follow the established pathways, and as such it may make some readers uncomfortable. This is as it should be, and I hope it provokes a healthy debate. As such, the mixed methods framework set out here is a major element of the original contribution to the field that this thesis makes, and it is intended to move our thinking forward.

Analysis proceeds on two synchronous paths. The first operates at the level of individual practices, examining individual behaviours in specific, communicative terms. This identified three thematic areas: the *sacralisation of the victim*, the *strategies of grief* deployed by (You)Tubers, and the *scripting of social injustice*. The purpose is to identify the platform-specific resources used to communicate ideas, values, and identities, how they enable and constrain different kinds of interactions, and what kinds of social connections they engender (Machin, 2013). The second level of analysis interrogates the social media space as ritual space. I use the term ‘space’ metaphorically as a way of referencing the complex and shifting mass of factors that must be present for ritual action to take place, including but not limited to the techno-structural, social and emotional. This is Bell’s (1992) *space of ritualisation* but re-thought for the digital age. This should be thought of as a space of strategic opportunity as much as any physically defined space. My approach is based on a tripartite model that sees ritual as: a shared *focus of attention* on an object or action; a *common emotional experience*; and some form of *collectivity assembly* (Bell, 1992; Couldry, 2005; Durkheim, 1976). It is within this seemingly simple framework that group solidarity, standards of morality, and symbolic forms are born and maintained.

1.4 Parameters, limitations and reflections

Theoretically driven qualitative social research is fraught with complications. The following caveats and explanations are in acknowledgement of the parameters and limitations of this type of endeavour, yet also in defence of the research design as the most appropriate method of investigation for this study:

- *Restricting the study to YouTube*. Perhaps the most difficult decision was to focus on one SNS when SMM was present in both cases and across a

number of platforms. In focusing solely on YouTube it is possible to build an incredibly rich picture, but it is acknowledged that this also limits the transferability of the findings.

- *The methodology is definitively interpretive* and is fully acknowledged as such. The epistemology of this research tradition sees knowledge obtained as partial, situated (i.e. specific to particular contexts rather than universally applicable) and relative (i.e. related to the researcher's world view and value system) (Wetherell, 2001). Research of this kind is, by definition, reflexive. I recognise this personal perspective can be seen as a weakness (see Kendall & Wickham, 2006), and as such I have clearly stated my research agenda and theoretical preconceptions at the outset.
- *The purposive sampling strategy* is based upon the researcher's theoretical assumptions concerning both the case and the broader area of research. The resulting corpus is not representative of the general population, nor does it profess to be (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This research is undertaken based on certain understandings and assumptions informing data collection and it is recognised that repeating the process within a different conceptual framework could be expanded to produce different results.

It is entirely legitimate to highlight the limitations of case study research in respect of a relative inability to judge the frequency or representativeness of the cases included. However, the cases here are not claimed to represent any more than themselves. Furthermore, this is a investigate, qualitative, theory-building study and so it is not my intention to establish the causal weight of variables (indeed, these types of inferential results are simply not suited to case studies of the type I employ here). As a qualitative researcher, it is vital to be tentative in drawing too many inferences from case study research (or interpretative work more generally) and 'up-scaling' them to the wider population, particularly when a phenomenon such as SMM draws in such a diverse and dispersed number of actors. But again, it is here that the mixing of methods draws strength,

because in combining qualitative with computational techniques, the number of data points grows exponentially. Whilst the research has only two ‘cases’, the number of ‘incidences’ of SMM and constituent actions includes many thousands of examples. The generalisability of the findings is thereby increased, and it is my hope that the discoveries of this project go on to be corroborated with other research studies to establish similarities and differences. Like any approach, case study work has its relative limitations. However, the advantages are obvious when one’s goal is to investigate social experiences, values, emotions, attitudes, and motivations in detail, and to establish the meaning that is derived by those involved (Devine, 2002, p.207). In short, theory building is best begun with intensive, in-depth case studies that represent the problem or phenomenon identified by the researcher, and this is my purpose here.

Finally, this study recognises that we inhabit a world of value pluralism, where ‘irreducible differences exist between the configurations of values to which people subscribe’ (Buckler, 2002, p.185). But I disagree with the argument that, despite being theoretically so, these are a matter of arbitrary choice. I therefore reject criticism that suggests this stance reduces the data to a ‘hermeneutic circle’. This stance is based on recognising that societies distinguish particular sets of principles as being normatively accepted or desirable.

1.4.1 A note on cultural insiders and outsiders

This study covers two very different cultural contexts. The cases concern events that – whilst open to the entire internet-enabled population to respond to online – are grounded in very real, material locations: Iran and Great Britain. I am British, and although I have travelled extensively and lived for several years in far-flung locales, in terms of British culture I am an ‘insider’. The murder of Lee Rigby took place less than ten miles from my home in South London. The fear, anger and shock of the events are real and personal; the rhetoric and

symbolism that runs through the case study is part of my subconscious. I have grown up with the hero-soldier figure as an indelible construct in British society, ever present in public life, the rituals of state, and media representations. I first became politically active when campaigning against the fateful invasion of Iraq following the terrible attacks on New York in 2001, and as such I experienced first hand what it meant to ‘profane’ the hero-soldier construct: to question the morality of what we were asking ‘Our Boys’ to do was tantamount to high treason. Counter arguments did not involve rationality or logic but emotional exhortations of nationhood, righteousness, and absolute moral superiority. This is not the place to renew these debates; I simply use the example to illustrate how analysis of the Lee Rigby case involved applying a cultural and cognitive toolkit that is part of my identity. In many ways it came easily (although certainly not in the emotional sense), yet it also brought its own complications. Whilst I do not believe in true researcher objectivity per se, I do believe research must be carried out at an emotional remove, and in an unbiased manner, which I have always strived to do.

In obvious contrast, I am not Iranian. I am not an expert on Iran, Iranian culture or society, and nor am I an expert on Shia Islam. I do not claim to be writing an analysis from the local frame or context, but I have strived to immerse myself in knowledge of each. I have drawn on the expertise of friends and colleagues to ensure, as much as possible, my interpretations are valid, relevant and credible. I have built my knowledge far beyond the specifics of the case, and feel incredibly lucky to have spent time with the classical writings of Omar Khayyám, Rumi, and Mawlana Jami alongside the contemporary works of Marjane Satrapi, Shahriar Mandanipour and Sadegh Hedayat, amongst others. And Attar’s wonderful *Conference of the Birds* is now something I read to my young sons, both born after this thesis had even begun. My research on the bloody and brutal history of Iran has been a less comfortable journey, but equally important. Nevertheless, in terms of the situated researcher, I remain an

‘outsider’. Yet, as I will explore throughout the thesis, the death of Neda Soltan was just as ‘real’ to me as that of Lee Rigby. I watched her last moments replayed over and over, as so many millions of others did. I was gripped, horrified, and deeply moved. I was living in Tel Aviv at the time, and with the oppressive summer heat adding to the stifling sense of helplessness, we all worried what effect the events in Tehran might have for the wider region.

These contrasting positions between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ do not compromise the research in any way. Instead they are a reflection of how the vast majority of us experience these global media events with varying degrees of temporal and emotional proximity, made common through networked media and our ability to insert ourselves within the political narrative. Whilst local cultural factors hugely influenced events, this is a study of a global phenomenon. It is concerned with the mediation of death, which automatically defines at least one degree of removal from events. My interest is in the relationship between the global and local, where both are implicated yet neither is more or less valid. When addressing a similar criticism to the one I face, Carston Stage noted ‘you simply cannot understand these globalised processes by strictly focusing on the cultural history of Iran, because this particular context has no authority to define how Neda is globally (or rather *glocally*) used, understood and rearticulated’ (2011, p.421). It is exactly this that interests me: global media processes served to disembody and de-contextualise Neda from the local context. She was then appropriated, re-contextualised, re-mediated, and commodified in myriad different ways, not least of all as a political martyr figure in the local frame. It is the vitality of this process that is central to my thinking on ritual, and importantly it does not exclude me as a researcher nor invalidate my analysis simply because I lack some kind of ‘insider’ viewpoint. Validity come from being honest, open and aware of these issues at every stage of the research.

Questions of subjectivity and researcher relationship with events will always invoke issues of reliability and generalisability, and this is as it should be. I

believe researcher subjectivity to be a valuable part of the research process, as supported by Flick (2002), and my subjectivity has brought forth new insights into this area of research. I have laid out a clear rationale for key theoretical and methodological research decisions, I have included extracts of significant data throughout the appendices, and I have linked and catalogued the full body of source data except where it conflicts with YouTube's Terms of Service and UK Fair Use legislation.

1.5 Academic contributions

The primary contribution of this thesis is the development of a robust conceptual framework for SMM. I hope that the term as defined and justified throughout has both resonance and relevance for researchers across a number of fields beyond those covered directly in this study, including memory studies, mediatization, digital humanities and more. This research also presents a novel and innovative methodological framework. The use of system-network mapping can be applied to any study of YouTube, and the principles adapted for application to any Social Network Site (SNS). The multimodal approach and its integration with digital methods allows for the parallel and synchronous analysis and discussion of diverse data. This results in a rich yet targeted set of results. Finally, this research has direct implications in the fields of ritual, media events, and digital culture. It reaffirms the vitality and relevance of ritual to questions of technology and social media. In doing so, this study shows that notions of the sacred and profane retain an important cognitive and conceptual role in contemporary society. On a more expansive level, this thesis moves media events theory into the digital realm. It builds on existing thinking and explores exciting new avenues. Finally, the thesis calls into question many of the established ways of thinking about grievability and the politics of pity, showing SMM to be an alteration of the architectures of grievability due to the appropriation of

the means of symbolic production. The thesis shows SMM to be a process of vernacular meaning-making, the vitality and significance of which is found in its constant and open challenge to established structure of meaning. As Roger Silverstone observed so aptly, mediated power can ‘create and sustain meanings; to persuade, endorse and reinforce...[as well as] the power to undermine’ (Silverstone, 1994, p.143).

1.6 Thesis structure

In this chapter I have started to define the key concepts that underpin this thesis, and set out the theoretical and methodological frames that inform the work. I have detailed the case studies, data sampling criteria, and modes of analysis. Finally, I have indicated the purpose of the study, and how it will be achieved. The remaining chapters are organised as follows:

CHAPTER TWO defines the conceptual framework for SMM that underpins this study. A simple review of current literature is insufficient here, because as an emergent phenomenon there is no predetermined tradition in which the study falls. Accordingly, this chapter locates and defines SMM between public mourning practices, media events and visual culture, and digital memorials. This defines the ‘public’ death as one with an inherent *narrative of social injustice*. It also shows SMM to be a *disruptive media event* in a way that bridges between Dayan & Katz (1992) and Turner’s theory of rupture, anti-structure and the liminal power of ritual (1969). The chapter then introduces the notion of the *platform vernacular* as an explanatory frame for capturing the specific practices contingent to instances of SMM. In closing, the chapter explores the transformative, social, and emotional functions of death rituals in a way that lays the groundwork for structuring the empirical analysis.

CHAPTER THREE sets out the research strategy and methodological framework. The parameters of the case study design are defined, explaining the choices behind sampling, coding, and the analytical frames. The combination of system-network mapping (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996), multimodality (Jewitt, 2009a; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) is outlined and justified. The network maps of the YouTube platform are introduced as they informed the development of the research design. They highlight the distinct modes of communication most relevant to the study, and they identify several points of significance that helped target analysis and directly informed the development of theory. I then review the three central modal assemblages of YouTube: locative signalling, videos and comment threads, defining a taxonomy of communicative *resources*, *affordances* and *realisations* for each. The chapter closes with a detailed account of how this is operationalised, and how this informs the structure of the empirical discussion. The glossary of terms presented in Appendix A is particularly relevant to this chapter.

CHAPTERS FOUR AND FIVE constitute the empirical case studies. These chapters discuss Neda Soltan and Lee Rigby in turn, exploring the multiple and diverse ways the victim was represented, reconstructed and remediated through SMM. Following the same broad structure, they begin by discussing the social, political and technological context of the death event before then moving through the three major themes identified in the analysis: the sacralisation of the victim, strategies of grief, and the scripting of social injustice. It is worth noting that whilst I employ a range of analytical techniques in cataloguing and categorising data and action, many of the ‘results’ (coding frames, tools, tables, etc.) are presented in the appendices rather than in the case study chapters to ensure clarity.

CHAPTER SIX presents a comparative analysis, moving between the points

of divergence and convergence that are most illustrative of the wider dynamics of SMM. The chapter presents a comprehensive account of the platform vernacular of SMM on YouTube, and highlights how the online space can operate as a ritual space. The chapter concludes by detailing the arguments for thinking about SMM as a *communion of grief*.

CHAPTER SEVEN reviews the premises, parameters, contributions and limitations of the thesis. I argue that SMM constitutes an appropriation of the process of public mourning, which reconfigures frames of grievability and mediates the dead through innovative, strategic means. The thesis closes with a review of the challenges posed by this type of study and highlights areas for future research.

Chapter 2

A conceptual framework for Social Media Memorialising

2.1 Introduction

There are certain deaths that impact the public in such a way as to be seen as exceptional, morally significant, and socially traumatic. They are therefore felt as *worthy of a publicly-framed expression of grief*, and Social Media Memorialising (SMM) has emerged as a distinct yet highly contextual response pattern in these moments. SMM occurs when events represent a social injustice: they involve moral or political transgressions, motivating debates about what is collectively understood as right and wrong (and as such are defined in distinction from celebrity deaths).¹ These high-profile deaths are a depressingly familiar element of modern life: it might be an individual such as Jyoti Singh, Michael

¹This is in contrast to the work of Pantti & Sumiala (2009) and Haughey & Campbell (2013) concerning celebrity culture. Whilst much of this has resonance, it is qualitatively different to the highly politicised death events that I am defining here, as shall be elaborated throughout.

Brown, or Khaled Said who captures the world's attention.² At other times it is a group of people: the passengers on flight MH17 or the children at the Manchester Arena. Their deaths speak of corruption, betrayal and neglect. They are a pollution of established norms and moral decency. Whilst we experience these deaths through media in one form or another, our need to respond is due first and foremost to this perception of social injustice; questions of media framing, visibility and gaze are secondary. Defining this phenomenon of a *public death event* is the first task of this chapter.

SMM is what people do online in response to these deaths. It is the coming together in a shared outpouring of emotion, made possible by networked media, online platforms, and UGC. It is the expression of sympathy of Facebook, the hashtag (#) of solidarity on Twitter, and the sharing of a tribute video on YouTube: small, potent symbolic acts of defiance, pain, anger, and loss. They are stylised, iterative, and offer differing levels of emotional immersion. Individually, each act is diminutive, but in combination they can be immense, with millions of people contributing in the vernacular of social media: *sharing, tweeting, posting, linking, tagging, pinning, watching, liking, and streaming*.³ It is a vast, multivocalic political and social commentary on what has happened, who is responsible, and what ought to occur if some sense of justice is to be restored. This process is about healing, grieving, and supporting just as much as sharing information about events.

The opening arguments of this thesis rest on four guiding observations of Social Media Memorialising:

1. *They are public.* The death itself is experienced *in* public and *by* the

²Jyoti Singh was the victim of the Delhi bus rape scandal in 2012 which led to international protests. Michael Brown was shot dead by a Ferguson police officer in 2014, helping to spark the Black Lives Matter movement. Khaled Said was killed by police in a precursor to the Egyptian revolution in 2011.

³For example, the 'We are All Khaled Said' Facebook page attracted over 1.9 million users (Rieder et al., 2015); whilst the hashtag #michaelbrown was used almost 10 million times in 2014 (Freelon et al., 2016).

public, and the reaction to it is shared and collective. The social rituals of reporting, speeches, commentary, marches, meetings and more transform an individual death into a public one, and in doing so they become symbolic renderings that reconstruct and reimagine events. SMM sits alongside these more established processes. *Ritual participation* is collective: an active commentary on the death event, questioning *what must have been* and *what should be*.

2. *They are mediated*, in every sense of the word, and that mediation acts upon both the event and its meaning. Whilst a full exploration of the mediation of public death will shortly follow, I use the term here in the literal sense of ‘passing through’ a mediating agent, and as a dialectical term for the continuous *ritual processes* in which media shape and are shaped by social life and culture (Silverstone, 2005).
3. *They are interactive*. These events are defined by their open participation and the co-creation of content. Their internal force is derived from a democratic participation as opposed to any hierarchical control or manipulation of symbolic content that is so integral to the curated and authoritative public memorials of the past (Doss, 2008). Interactivity shows SMM to be a process that is fluid and constantly evolving and defines User Generated Content (UGC) as a central component. *Ritual space* is opened up.
4. *They are open-ended*. The location online means that SMM does not function within the formal boundaries of social norms. Participation is ongoing and in response to personal emotional drivers rather than established patterns of mourning rituals. *Ritual time* is both collapsed and continuous.

These four observations contain the impetus for this study. The *publicness* of SMM marks it as an emergent social process made possible by changes in tech-

nology (namely mobility, connectivity, interactivity, personalisation, inclusivity and low barriers to entry), but not defined entirely by them. Technology hosts, enables and impacts the form and function of SMM but is in no way reducible to it. The mediated nature of events and our reactions to them reflects a performativity that impacts both the meaning of events and our understanding of them. Interactivity reflects an appropriation of the process by which certain deaths are deemed ‘grievable’, away from the official institutions of state and to wider society. The removal of barriers to entry means that public deaths are defined as such from the bottom-up, undermining the hierarchical structures of old.

The primary research question of this thesis is: *how does social media memorialising function as a cultural mechanism in response to public death events*. The short answer is *through ritual*, and is a central premise for this study. Ritual, as Catherine Bell (1992; 1997) has argued, provides a window for examining the cultural dynamics by which people make and remake their worlds. As a response pattern in times of change, trauma, and crisis, ritual reflects something essential about human emotions, needs, and moral orientations. As Jeffrey Alexander (2004, pp.29-30) states, rituals are episodes of simplified cultural communication that are expressed through symbolic behaviour and which carry with them some degree of shared rules and practices. The prescriptive validity of ritual comes from the participants’ engagement with and acceptance of the ritual itself. The basic observation is that our actions must be mutually understood as constituting grieving, mourning, etc., if they are to have meaning to the individual actor *or* the wider community. It is my argument that ritual serves as the missing element, connecting the complex mix of motivations, actions, emotions, signs and symbols that constitute collective online memorialising.

Death rituals serve three major purposes. Most obviously about healing, death rituals reconcile the bereaved with the loss they have borne and the future implications of that loss. In doing so, they provide a framework with which

to manage emotions and articulate grief, with distinct phases of proximity to the dead and re-integration with the social group. Death rituals also serve as an aid to transition. They are a bridge between dying as an event and death as a state of being, and therefore this transition concerns the dead, the bereaved, and the wider community of mourning. Finally (but not exhaustively), death rituals locate the dead within the physical and moral boundaries of the community, serving to confirm and strengthen social bonds amongst members (see Durkheim, 1976; Metcalf & Huntington, 1991; Morse, 2014; Sumiala, 2013; Turner, 1969; Van Gennep, 1960). These categories are not mutually exclusive, but they serve an important purpose in understanding why death rituals continue to hold such social significance.

This framework becomes clear when we look at funerary rites in almost any culture. Bathing and dressing the dead, sitting in mourning,⁴ the way in which a corpse is interned or disposed of, the prayers and acts we perform as we do so: these all operate within a strictly controlled and mutually acknowledged system of meaning. They serve to define individuals, spaces, places, and times as those of official mourning, within which come altered expectations of behaviour.⁵ This shared symbolic reading brings solace, comfort and reconciliation, without which the heightened emotions and stylised actions would mark us as outside society's norms. It is this dynamic that concerns me here, as the unprompted online communion of grief that follows the public death event is defined by an *absence or reconfiguring* of institutional rules, officiating and authoritative figures, strictures of time and place, prescribed actions, and the language and sounds of tradition. These are moments of creativity, spontaneity, even freedom of expression. Yet they have new boundaries, defined through the affordances of the technical architecture of a particular platform, and policed by human

⁴ For example, the Catholic *Vigil for the Deceased*, the Jewish sitting of *Shiva*.

⁵ Doka (2009, p.37) suggests that there exists a set of 'grieving rules' specific to each society that govern who, when, where, how and for how long grieving should take place, and puts forward the notion of 'disenfranchised grief' to signify grief which falls outside these socially sanctioned rules.

and algorithmic gatekeepers ready to flag and remove ‘unsuitable’ content that doesn’t adhere to the standards of the host community.

First articulated by Arnold van Gennep and later expanded upon by Victor Turner, ritual is seen as having three distinct phases: separation, liminality, and re-integration. Here, the death event is our point of rupture, our separation from the norms of everyday society. SMM exists in the liminal, the ‘betwixt and between’ in Turner’s (1969) now infamous words. Where formal rites provide a structured guide through life’s seminal transitions, the space of *ritualisation* operates on the same axis but outside officiated, controlled social frameworks. This is Turner’s *anti-structure*, characterised as transgressive, speculative and creative, generating powerful symbolic imagery and philosophical ideals. However, it also carries an inherent instability and potential for conflict.

Before going further, I want to briefly explain my use of the active *memorialisation* over the static *memorials*. There has been a lot of healthy debate and criticism over the tendency to activate a noun through the suffix of ‘-isations’, most notably by Billig (2013). In essence, the argument against is that academic waffle is more about the desire to coin a term that will gain traction in one’s field rather than trying to bring clarity to an idea. The second criticism is that defining a noun as an action is often simply false: that objects do not always ‘operate’. Billig has a point. However, in my defence there is a huge difference between a memorial as a noun and *the act of memorialising*, which is definable, observable, and tangible. Memorials often capture the sentiments and motivations behind them, but, as I am interested in the social *processes* they represent, the active form is necessary.

This is our point of departure. As mentioned in the previous chapter (section 1.2.1), my take on ritual is neo-Durkheimian. That is to say, I reject the notion that ritual *automatically* defines some form of community (whether online or in aboriginal tribes).⁶ Ritual is *social*, *interactive*, and *emotionally* driven, and

⁶In his seminal *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1976), Durkheim boldly states

it is Durkheim's observations of the power of ritual in *defining categories* that I draw on most heavily. Ritual creates both physical and conceptual boundaries, and this thesis will show SMM to define and articulate this in striking ways, primarily through the extreme categories of 'sacred' and 'profane'. For all the competing definitions of ritual, my preference lies with Christopher Helland's simple observation that ritual 'is purposeful engagement with the sacred (whatever the sacred may be for those involved)' (2013, p.27).

Conceptually, there are three elements to reconcile (at least partially) before it is possible to address these questions fully. First, what exactly do I mean by the 'public death event'? What marks out certain deaths in distinction from others, and how is this type of death different from the hugely prolific and closely associated celebrity death event? This involves questioning the mediatization of death, the politics of pity, and the notion of grievability. Second, what can we take from the field of media events to inform our understanding? Finally, how has the online space come to appropriate the commemoration of public deaths, serving as the primary space for a public to grieve? The following sections tackle each of these issues in turn.

2.2 The non-celebrity death-event: theorising the 'public death'

Why are some lives mourned and others not? For a death to become a 'public death' it must be established as *extraordinary*, and set apart from the thousands

that ritual is nothing less than 'society in action', the means through which social solidarity is created, secured and confirmed. Although rightly criticised for his restrictive functionalism, Durkheim's key observations retain power and relevance, which can be summarised accordingly: (1) There are particular moments of significance in which individuals come together in ritual. At these times, a heightened emotional state, or 'collective effervescence', creates a sense of collective identity and intersubjectivity; (2) These rituals involve a collective focus on certain objects, instructions and actions that confirms a sacred status upon them and what they represent; (3) This collective and shared process of distinguishing the sacred and profane categorisations is the singularly most important in the organisation of social life.

of other deaths the world witnesses every day. Individuals are deemed ‘worthy’ of public grief for a variety of reasons: service to their nation, their significant position in a society, or because of the particular conditions of their passing. In each case, the death is felt as collectively traumatic; there is a sense that the social group is worse off in some way as a result. There are two elements to the definition of the public death as I use the term here. First, a public death is understood as morally significant and is therefore borne entwined with a narrative of social injustice. By this I mean to say that the death represents some form of moral corruption of what is held to be right and wrong by a community or collective.⁷ Whilst moral reasoning resides primarily in the individual, conceptions of social (in)justice are constituted through the alignment of individuals over notions of rights, freedoms, dignity, etc. A central theme of this research is illustrating how self-selected online communities – bound together by emotional alignment and ethical attachments – can take precedence over predetermined ‘membership’ groups (such as nation, ethnic, religious, etc.) in defining standards of morality and justice.

As such, the definition of a *public death* put forward here sits in distinction from the death of a celebrity, although they are closely related phenomena. The death of a celebrity captures the media gaze primarily because of their achievements in life, and not because of the unjust conditions of their death.⁸ Second, a public death is also a media event, and the one cannot be understood in isolation from the other. In a public death, forces of media affect all those involved: the deceased, the bereaved, the witnesses, bystanders and distant observers. It is fair to say that a public death is therefore a mediatized death (Scott, 2017).⁹

⁷The way I use ‘social injustice’ here is therefore quite distinct from the field of enquiry concerned with equality, the distribution of wealth, equal opportunity, privilege, etc.

⁸Whilst the celebrity death can indeed be felt as a trauma, it is an individual trauma shared, rather than a shared trauma. Anu Harju (2014) illustrates exactly this with her analysis of online mourning practices dedicated to Steve Jobs, whilst Haughey & Campbell (2013) argue that fan reactions to the death of Michael Jackson serve to reconstruct the pop star as nothing less than a modern-day martyr. These are both important works that can inform our thinking of media and memory work, but as death events they are fundamentally different.

⁹Following Krotz (2007), mediatization is taken to be a meta-process similar to globalisa-

For clarity, I offer the following definition:

A public-death event concerns those deaths that are considered exceptional, unnatural, unjust and therefore morally significant and worthy of public mourning and grief. They are experienced primarily through the media and are entangled with and inseparable from technological processes of mediation, characterised by strong visual, affective and dramatic elements.

Conventionally, public memorialisation has been determined, controlled and defined by the political institutions of state. Public spaces the world over are littered with physical memorials to significant members of society that combine a narrative of personal or national triumph with some form of public service or sacrifice. They communicate a society's foundational beliefs, origin myths, or progressive narrative through iconic figures that reflect the dominant political narrative at the time of their commission. In so doing, they become physically etched into public space, entrenching and reconstructing those standards in social memory over long periods of time.¹⁰ As Katz (1976) explains, 'Monuments are metaphors for human values, persistent values that survive despite notice or neglect'.¹¹ The significant observation is that traditionally a public death has been defined as such by an established hierarchical process which is separate from the death event itself. Particularly noticeable in war memorials, death, trauma and sacrifice become active discursive tools to communicate meaning in a way that shapes collective memory, propagates a particular interpretation of events, and locates the self within them (Mayo, 1988).¹²

tion, individualisation and commercialisation, and at its most simple is a theoretical construct with which to understand particular societal changes due to the role of media and technology. Whereas mediation refers (narrowly) to information passing through or being dependent on an intermediary agent, mediatization concerns social and cultural factors that become entangled with and inseparable from technological processes of mediation.

¹⁰Think particularly of the Founding Fathers at Mount Rushmore; Lord Nelson in Trafalgar Square; Ghandi at India Gate; Mandela in Pretoria.

¹¹To avoid any claims of misrepresentation, I should note that the full quote continues '...unaccounted for by computers, cynicism, or professions of piety'. Considering the time it was written (1976) I think the observation contained in the quote is stronger without the second half, which betrays a personal bias by the author. The original point still stands.

¹²From the Cenotaph in London's Whitehall (1919), La Tombe du Soldat Inconnu in Paris (1920), the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington (1982) the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin (2005), the commemoration of war dead sits in distinction to war memorials

Abousnnouga and Machin (2013) have produced an excellent multi-modal social-semiotic study of war memorials that is both robust and convincing. They show how the specific affordances of three-dimensional sculptures — such as distance, scale, angularity, materials, mobility, transitivity, etc., — function on a range of cognitive and cultural levels when communicating ideas, values and identities. In doing so, they provide a toolkit for examining the semiotics of material objects more generally that carries the possibility for being adapted to the study of the ‘products’ of online memorialisation: videos, comments and other articulations. Their take on what they term Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) shows how even static objects can be approached as a form of social practice (ibid, 2013, pp.19-39). In combining Critical Discourse Analysis in the tradition of Fairclough (1992) with the social semiotics of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) they illustrate how discourses of ideology and power are present in the design choices of war memorials, and how these operate in context.

The question then, is can this analysis capture the fluidity and interactivity of public memorialising? It is an incredibly rich line of thinking, but suffers in defining memorials as static objects. In reality, there are times throughout the year that they come alive as focal points for mass rituals of remembrance.¹³ The ritual of remembrance that are enacted in and around memorials are a central aspect of their social function, but they choose not to engage with this aspect of memorials. These rituals can help explain emotional life of memorials and the role they play for the community in which they reside. It is the lived role that ensures meaning is communicated. Memorials are placed in public spaces and the performance of ritualised remembrance make the space sacred, even if only at certain times. Memorials themselves are not inherently sacred nor

that simply celebrate victory and patriotism. On the one hand, they serve to legitimise war and maintain it as a necessary, logical and rational aspect of preserving the nation (Rausch, 2007). On the other hand, they represent the remediation of death as ‘cultural memory’, embedded in notions of personal and collective identity. Assmann (2008, p.110) defines his use of cultural memory in distinction from the wider term ‘collective memory’ that is often separate from the cultural questions of identity, tradition, contingency, etc.

¹³This criticism of Abousnnouga and Machin (2013) is not meant to take away from their work, but rather highlight a further line of thinking that would add another dimension to it.

profane: it is their role in rituals that transfers these ideals into physical space and bring with them expectations of behaviour. This becomes writ large when a profanation is perceived: the burning of a poppy at a memorial, the desecration of a grave, or failing to properly respect the traditional rites of memory, all of which elicit powerful, visceral responses. This reflects a powerful — if irrational — emotional investment in these places, or rather in what they represent. This is not a static state defined by the designers, but can be manipulated and activated through social rituals.

War is perhaps the ultimate example of the dead ‘belonging’ to a public: they are *our* dead, their sacrifice was for *our* benefit, having died in service to *our* nation. We might best think of this as a kind of *state-sanctioned memory*, a veneration of the victim that is inherently political, controlled, top-down and (generally) populist; it is a powerful tool in the armoury of official society. This brings us to the most important observation concerning public memorialisation in formal monuments: that they are *for* the public and not *of* the public. SMM is significant because the process by which the ‘worth’ of the dead is decided has been appropriated by the public, in real time, in a bottom-up process that sits alongside or substitutes officiated sentiment.

The process through which the morality of the dead is established is one of veneration, which serves to locate the victim within a set of cultural signifiers and reflects the shared sacred sentiments of a group. To venerate derives from the Latin *venerare*, simply meaning to regard with great reverence and respect. In short, establishing reverence gives *meaning to loss*. This process involves the accentuation of positive characteristics and the reduction of negatives, locating the victim in a cultural framework of explicit symbols and implicit signs that communicate significance, marking the dead as separate from the everyday. In other words, it distinguishes the sacred from the profane (and the mundane). War memorials do this through a standardised form: brass statues, simple granite sculptures, etc., that serve to sacralise what is otherwise ordinary, everyday

space. SMM performs the same function by drawing from the resources afforded by networked technology, particularly in terms of UGC: the dead are animated with doves, candles and wreaths, funeral songs, poems or military music. These symbolic renderings locate the victim and the space within a venerative frame of mourning.

In something of a bridge between the state-sanctioned signifiers of public memorials and SMM, we find what Santino (2003; 2004) has termed ‘spontaneous shrines’: the ephemeral memorials that form in physical space after traumatic deaths. These are most widely associated with the ‘Sea of Flowers’ at the gates of Buckingham Palace following the death of Princess Diana in 1997, whereby tens of thousands of people flocked to Buckingham Palace to add their flowers, candles, ribbons and other items to the impromptu memorial at the gates in a public outpouring of emotion that was completely unprecedented in scale or form. Similar practices were observed following the September 11 attacks in New York, the London bombings, and the Madrid attacks. In very little time, it has become a normalised social response pattern to traumatic events. These are intrinsically public: they are visible, they are material, they are spontaneous in their motivation, and they are participatory. This represents a major shift in the participants and the role which they play. No longer are they controlled by official society — clergy, political figures, etc., — with the public little more than an audience or passive communion, these are bottom-up, self-motivated and unofficial responses. They appear in public spaces without official sanction or curation and are actually often seen as problematic by state and clerical actors. However, as they have become an established response pattern they are increasingly formulaic and universalised¹⁴ With Princess Diana, this unprompted

¹⁴The impromptu construction of temporary memorials at the physical sites of untimely deaths (or symbolically significant alternatives) has been widely discussed but with very different definitions. Peter Margry (2007) uses ‘performative memorials’ to reflect their active nature; Erica Doss (2008) argues for the term ‘temporary memorials’ in recognition of the ephemeral nature of these assemblages; Santino’s (2003) term ‘spontaneous shrines’ emphasises the self-motivation of those involved, and it is this that has been most widely adopted. Santino has more recently refined his thinking, and argues for the less catchy ‘performative commemoratives’ (Santino, 2006) which is closer to my thinking here.

outpouring of emotion was a direct response to a perceived disconnect between what the public felt as deeply traumatic and the Royal Family's refusal to acknowledge it as such. In other words, there was a failure by official society to mark this trauma in the way the public felt it should be. Recent studies have shown how these memorials mediate grief through the 'physical embodiment of public affect' (Doss, 2008, p.24).¹⁵ These shrines are intrinsically public: they are visible, they are material, they are spontaneous in their motivation, and they invite participation.

In contrast, Santino (2003; 2004; 2006) looks at what we can learn from the way a public group chooses to display aspects of themselves in spontaneous shrines. Based primarily on ethnographic and semiotic analysis of memorials in Northern Ireland during the troubles, his most important observation concerns the way in which these memorials invite participation, even from strangers. Because they are 'open' to the public they personalise political issues, and in doing so become highly politicised themselves (2006, p.12). The major contribution from research on spontaneous shrines is Santino's observation that 'by translating social issues and political actions into personal terms, the shrines are themselves political statements' (2004, p.370). Thus there is a performativity to these shrines in a double sense. First, they are a public performance of grief, produced in public spaces and inviting participation in a manner that formulates them as intrinsically public deaths; a sense of *ownership* is created. Second, they are performative commentaries on social political issues, marking a wrong that must avoid repetition, and thereby constructing a narrative of injustice that becomes

¹⁵Doss's work is particularly striking in highlighting the way material objects mediate between the living and dead through the cards, flowers and other ephemera that combine into these collective articulations. Her largely ethnographic study explores how these objects feed into the metaphors and clichés associated with life, death and memory: the beauty of nature (flowers), the fragility of life (candles), the (declarative but illusory) permanence of memories (photographs), innocence (children's toys), and redemption of death in an afterlife (angels, crosses, etc.). They are not very nuanced heuristics, but the study serves to show the desperate need to signify – and to do so collectively – that people feel in times of trauma. It can also add to our understanding of the visual content that is shared online in similar times. Harriet Senie (2006) has shown how these displays sacralise public space that echoes the previous discussion but reflects the unstructured and impromptu nature of temporary memorials. Likewise, Gibson (2011) frames roadside memorials as the public performance of private grief.

inseparable from the death event. The result of this dual performativity is the creation of moral boundaries both around the social understanding of the death event and the physical space of the shrine. Just as official memorials create a sacred space in a public one, so do spontaneous shrines, as reflected in the suspension of norms that would, under normal circumstances, result in the quick removal of such objects (concerning health and safety, littering, etc.). The fact they are left untouched signals their sacrality.

If this study had been written ten years ago, the first sentence of my definition of a public death might have been sufficient, and spontaneous shrines may well have been the central object of study. They highlight the public need to act when institutional responses are too slow, inadequate or simply absent, and their nature reflects a powerful vernacular conjunction of the performative and commemorative. The online space has altered this equation. Since Diana, September 11, the London bombings and other traumatic events, SNS use has become so common as to be almost mundane, smartphones are ubiquitous, and connectivity largely unbroken for the majority of us in the Western context. So whilst we still see physical memorials, they play something of a diminished role, their temporality accentuated by co-existing virtual memorialising. Whilst certain horrific events produce spontaneous shrines, they tend to resonate more with the local audience than the distant witness. They are more commonly part of localised issues (the white bicycles, for example); SMM outlives and outgrows spontaneous shrines in terms of time, space and scale.

2.3 Media event, media ritual

The notion of a public death that I am developing here is inseparable from processes of media and mediation. History is littered with icon imagery that has come signify much more than the death of an individual: the Vietnamese general shooting dead a suspected Viet Cong prisoner, Jeffrey Miller lying dead at the

Kent State university, and Capra's infamous image of the death of a Republican soldier in the Spanish Civil War. Yet these images are pre-digital, and as such they tend to singular and static. Today's media environment of smartphones and endless news cycles means multiple witnesses, a sense of immediacy and urgency, and an up-scaling of events. As such, the public death is also a media event.¹⁶ Dayan and Katz define media events as 'those historic events. . . that are televised as they take place and transfix a nation or the world' (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p.2). Media events are public ceremonies, deemed historic, and characterised by their live-ness, their interruption of the everyday, their scripted character, huge audiences and reverent, integrative narratives (ibid., 1992, pp.1-24). A media event can become an all-conquering mnemonic, providing the visual substance of our collective memory, and the personal, historical and political frames in which we locate events.¹⁷

With a distinctly Durkheimian flavour, Dayan and Katz illustrate how media events both construct and reaffirm social bonds by activating the shared morals and values of a society (Ibrahim, 2010, p.126), and following the assassination of JFK and the death of Princess Diana we can certainly see this occurring. In truth, the media event can become such a strong mnemonic that ultimately comes to displace all else. They provide not only the substance of our collective memory, but also the personal, historical and political frame: JFK is inseparable from those images of the motorcade travelling through Dallas, just as Diana's memory will always be conjoined with the confused and emotional bystanders gathering outside Buckingham palace captured by news crews. Dayan and Katz go as far as suggesting media events 'are in competition with the writing of history' (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p.213). This shows how the broadcast space

¹⁶Accordingly, we could well suggest that death itself has become 'mediatized', following Sumiala (2014). This debate must be held at another time, although I have written elsewhere of the importance of the terminology (Scott, 2017), and mediatization, although uncomfortable to the English lexicon, is increasingly gaining traction as the term of choice (see Couldry & Hepp, 2013, for a full review).

¹⁷Dayan and Katz go as far as suggesting media events 'are in competition with the writing of history' (1992, p.213).

can suspend and reconfigure experience from an individual to a collective one. However, the advent of digital technology is altering the ability of media events to perform their conciliatory functions with their previous efficacy.¹⁸

Ubiquitous media, the proliferation of smartphones and almost constant connectivity mean that today's death events are often captured on digital devices, with digital testimony entering the online space almost immediately. In these moments local injustices and struggles can become elevated onto the global stage by what I have identified elsewhere as 'performative rituals of local witnessing' (Scott, 2017, p.2).¹⁹ The resulting imagery is often raw, unedited and distorted, imbuing it with a coded authenticity. They communicate an embodied, affective experience from 'within' events more faithfully than any professionally shot footage ever could. This coming together of witnessing through technology with the media event produces what Ibrahim (2012a, p.37) calls a 'mnemonic memory':

[It] can be consumed out of context and is amenable to multiple meaning-making, which widens the notion of the media event. This not only complicates the notion of witnessing but is part of a postmodern visuality where there is an accelerated sense of non-stop capture of events, and as such the gaze (enabled through technologies embedded to the body) can fall without warning, connecting it to a wider media spectacle.

The theory of a public death event I am building differs from the traditional notion of a media event because it is *disruptive* rather than *integrative*.²⁰ Much

¹⁸The ability of mass-media broadcast events is questioned first by the notion of 'disaster marathons' that tend to split, rather than unite, a public. For a discussion of disaster marathons, see Tamar Leibes (1998). Both Dayan and Katz have since separately reassessed the concept and limited it to the now-passed features of the broadcast era. See Katz & Liebes (2007) and Dayan (2010).

¹⁹At any public event we are now surrounded by camera phones held aloft for the recording, sharing, narration and authentication of experience, which can be transformed into moments of witnessing by chance. I use the term 'performative' because these acts are doing something to the event, and in doing so they change their meaning (i.e., performing some kind of social action). These are ritual acts in the sense that they are strategies of differentiation that distinguish and privilege certain objects and actions from others (Bell, 1992, p.74). They are not reducible to the sensory experience of events because witnessing is also a discursive act that recalls that experience for the absent audience.

²⁰I take the term 'disruptive' media events from Katz & Liebes (2007). Their discussion

like spontaneous shrines, they evolve from the bottom up. Gone are the days of a hegemonic media able to curate, narrate, and codify moments of grand social significance. Where ceremonial media events are produced between broadcasters and political elites, disruptive media events are co-produced between any number of agents: media institutions, politicians, commentators, victims, and perpetrators all play their part.²¹ Now we have the social media space adding to (*not* replacing) this mix: millions of actors constituting an immense networked public, and all competing to construct a compelling narrative framework, with disparate and ephemeral communities of solidarity and agreement appearing and retreating.²² The online aspect of public death events may be distinct, but it cannot be separated from the offline media event.²³ This is now a primary factor in determining which deaths come to be defined as ‘worthy’ of communal grieving or otherwise. Judith Butler (2009) terms this ‘grievability’ in her exploration of how life, death, war and violence are framed by the media in ways that bias certain interpretations. When death becomes the central spectacle in this way, a ‘politics of pity’ will surely follow. As Boltanski (1999) explains, pity is centred on observation: it is primarily about seeing and consuming the suffering of others by those who do not experience it directly. It is in this heady mixture of imagery, emotions, technology, algorithmic protocols, regulations, norms and social structures that a public death event becomes

differentiates between the ceremonial media events of Dayan and Katz and what they term ‘Major News Events’, juxtaposing the two types as integrative and disruptive although, they resist formalising their own terminology. I think this is a mistake, as ‘Major News Events’ is too broad a term, and serves to actually dislocate itself from the invaluable contextual grounding of Media Events Theory. As such, I use the terms integrative and disruptive media events throughout to refer to the original theorising and expanding upon it. I also reject the term ‘Conflicted Media Events’ put forward by Fiske (1996) and Hunt (1999) because these, as defined, are more about content than impact. This means they are based on explicit social conflict: race, class, gender. The term *disruptive media event* is at once more specific to the character of the event, whilst opening up the context beyond specific societal conflicts because of the way the term employs the earlier theorising of Dayan and Katz.

²¹Co-production is a necessary simplification at this time. The reality does not reflect a neat ‘product’ or any implied consensus, but instead narrative and representations are in constant conflict and competition. It is this battle – consciously acknowledged or otherwise – that ultimately defines meaning and standards of morality around an event.

²²It is important to note that whilst the internet pluralises participation, it does not necessarily democratise impact. Cf. Papacharissi (2009); Morozov (2011).

²³Equally, any media event will always have an online facet.

constituted as such. By folding together in this way it would appear to create a sense of possession, ownership and proximity to the event for a witnessing public.

The ritual dimensions of these events have not gone unnoticed (Carey, 2009; Cottle, 2006; Couldry, 2003; Pantti & Sumiala, 2009; Sumiala, 2013). Nick Couldry (2003, p.4) defines media rituals thus:

Media rituals refer to the whole range of situations where media themselves ‘stand in’ or appear to ‘stand in’ for something wider, something linked to the fundamental organisational level on which we are, or imagine ourselves to be, connected as members of a society.

Couldry’s media rituals are firmly grounded in the broadcast frame, but his thinking provides two particular insights that are valuable here.²⁴ First, Couldry illustrates how media rituals are forms of symbolic communication that operate primarily through the ordering power of categories. Above all, he tells us, ritual is patterned action that enacts the world through form (Couldry, 2012, p.72). Drawing from what Boltanski calls ‘the field of determination of what is’ (quoted in Couldry, 2012, p.75), Couldry illustrates how the categories produced and defined in ritual organise our media practices in a form that is obligatory, repeatable and meaningful. These frames often operate through binary oppositions of ‘them (evil)’ and ‘us (good)’ that define the grievable life in terms of ideological polarities (Alexander, 2011). So these reductive categories suggest or stand in for an underlying value. In turn, this ‘value’ comes to communicate a sense that ‘the social’ is somehow ‘at stake’ in the ritual itself (Couldry, 2005, p.127).²⁵ Couldry’s second observation is even more important, since it

²⁴Briefly, Couldry uses post-Durkheimian and rather disparagingly categorises Dayan and Katz as neo-Durkheimian. This is based on the central premise that ‘The’ media operate such a pivotal role in maintaining a collective community that might actually not exist at all, which is a strong argument and not problematic in itself. The problem is that his argument is also based entirely in a broadcast frame, inasmuch as it depends on gatekeeper control of the message. This simply does not account for the plurality of voices – professional and otherwise – in today’s media environment.

²⁵Couldry opens Durkheim’s often reductive categories of sacred and profane to a range of categories that organise, normalise, and legitimise certain ways of being, thinking and doing

concerns approaching media ritual as a form of practice: as something active, as something social, and as something human beings *do* based on our *needs*. So ritual must be approached as a form of patterning and regularity that bridges all aspects of social life, as part of the everyday, not separated physically or conceptually from it. Couldry turns to Catherine Bell's (1992) previously mentioned thinking on *ritualisation* as a key concept that we shall return to in due course.

In summary, SMM cannot and should not be thought of as existing outside the media events frame – a public death event is a media event – but it equally cannot be entirely understood within it. The social media space brings fluidity: interactivity, intertextuality and multimodality online references *identity* and *collectivity* just as much as it does *content*. Fluidity means personalisation, impermanence, and potential fragility. Simon Cottle offers a definition of what he calls 'mediatized rituals', defined as 'those performative media phenomenon that serve to sustain and/or mobilise collective sentiments and solidarities on the basis of symbolisation and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be' (Cottle, 2006, p.415).²⁶ Cottle's definition is an important addition since it captures both the participatory aspect of spontaneous shrines and the moralism (i.e. injustice) inherent to the public death event.

that is resonant of Entman's framing theory (Entman, 1993). Accordingly, rituals serve as an anchor (cognitive, affective, discursive) for all sorts of other practices that engage with the same categories and values, and importantly this connects ritual with the management of conflict as much as those functionalist tendencies toward solidarity and cohesion. The key difference that Couldry argues is his position that media rituals serve to propagate the 'myth of the mediated centre'. That is, the media are self-serving by constructing narratives that cast themselves as protectors and occupants of the 'heart' of society (2004).

²⁶Cottle has at times been highly critical of Couldry's thinking, suggesting it is too firmly rooted in the notion of the media 'manufacturing consent' (Cottle, 2006), and the two engaged in a high profile debate that was played out across the pages of the journal *Media, Culture and Society*. Not wishing to entirely retread these arguments here, both academics have contributed much to our understanding of the field, but it is Cottle who's definition has more to give to the online manifestation of media rituals.

2.4 Online memorialising

I turn to online memorial practices more specifically now, and in particular to the idea of a ‘platform vernacular’, a term used to reflect the way in which social media platforms come to develop their own unique forms and styles of communicating in response to the social and technical affordances of each. First, it is necessary to briefly review the impact of online technologies on death, dying and commemoration, either on platforms that were intentionally designed for this or on SNS, that were not.²⁷ The past decade has seen a proliferation of formalised, commercial memorial platforms that are in essence the re-creation of cemeteries online, the study of which has generally involved the psychology of grief support (Moss, 2004; Roberts, 2004; 2006).²⁸ These feature shrines, eulogies, biographies and interactive guest-book style features that incubate a semi-public display of emotional bonds.²⁹

In general, the study of formal web memorials lacks a certain depth, suffering from being seen as little more than a transference of offline practices into the digital realm (see Moss, 2004; De Vries & Rutherford, 2004; Egnoto et al., 2014). But they do provide some insight into the motivations for SMM and the role they play. In providing an accessible, open ‘space’ for remembrance, online memorials

²⁷Heverinen (2010) divides online memorialising between intentional and unintentional sites, whereas Sofka (2009) classifies between grief specific and non-grief specific.

²⁸Indeed, many funeral packages now come with an online element included as standard. There has been a quiet proliferation in sites and tools that are developed to specifically support death-centric practices, referred to by Massimi et al. (2010) as thanasensitive technologies. These cover the obvious – web memorials as devices for reflection and meaning-making across platforms – but also includes issues of technology heirlooms and digital rights management after death. This line of thinking also suggests that thanasensitivity can be a critical tool in conceptualising internet behaviour (Massimi & Charise, 2009, p.2464). Moncur & Kirk (2014) build on this by explaining that ICTs can create memorials with increased potential along three axes: physical-digital, central-distributed, and concrete-performative. Although it is significant that software developers are recognising this potential for design (and presumably commercialisation), these are not particularly revelatory observations about digital technology use. As cultural observers we have long been aware of these ‘axes’: they constitute the continual negotiation between the digital and the physical that most of us now live every day. So whilst it is significant that scholarship and industry are acknowledging the increasing aspect of ritual memorialising online, it is not necessary to re-invent the wheel in order to create appropriate spaces for responding to death and trauma: they are already there.

²⁹Lattanzi & Hale (1985) suggest that the act of writing about the deceased is an important death ritual in its own right.

serve to focus our attention on a certain object or action in a manner that is present in every ritual form (see Bell, 1992; Collins, 2004; Schechner, 1987, and the discussion in section 2.1 above). In creating this focal point, online memorials can maintain an attachment that delays or substitutes any finality, mediating and remediating the dead in a perpetual state of proximity.³⁰ De Vries and Rutherford (2004) believe this makes it possible for the living to sustain a lasting relationship with the dead that can have a hugely important emotional role. Certainly there is something fundamental about mourning being an open-ended process, with implications for both mourners and the dead. Harju (2014) argues that digital memorials serve as spaces for the negotiation, legitimisation and alleviation of grief,³¹ but with the context of the public death event these formal sites will always be of limited relevance, and their account of ritual tends to be lacking.³²

There is a much richer line of thinking that examines how grieving and support formulate on social networks. Online, questions of private and public grief, the sequestration of death and dying from everyday life, and boundaries between mourners and audience are folded into each other.³³ Carroll and Landry's (2010) study of Facebook and MySpace is striking because it appears to be the first of its kind that directly assesses the subversive use of SNS as sites of mourning.³⁴

³⁰Lagerkvist (2013) goes as far as to suggest that online memorials might ultimately represent the deferral of death as we stay socially alive (in living memory and as evolving digital entities) after becoming biologically dead.

³¹In fact, a recent overview paper by Walter et al. (2012) titled 'Does the Internet Change How We Die and Mourn?' seems to conclude exactly this.

³²This is certainly true when compared to a growing body of literature examining online ritual in combination with anthropology, theology and media studies that is much more nuanced and convincing. See Scheifinger's (2013) study of Hindu worship online, Connelly's (2013) exploration of Buddhist ritual in Second Life, Boyns and Loprieno's (2013) work on Interaction Rituals in parasocial relationships are just a few. I myself have previously written on the use of mobile telephone apps for religious ritual purposes (Scott, 2016a).

³³For a review of the field, see Gibbs et al. (2015); Haverinen (2014); Knudsen & Stage (2013); Refslund C & Gotved (2014); Walter et al. (2012).

³⁴Times move quickly in the digital sphere: since Carroll and Landry's work, Facebook now has multiple applications designed specifically for creating or converting profiles into memorials such as: <https://apps.facebook.com/my-memorials/>; [http://designtaxi.com/news/362418/A-Facebook-App-For-Creating-Memorial-Pages-For-Ones-Who-Have-Passed/?interstitial_shown=1](http://designtaxi.com/news/362418/A-Facebook-App-For-Creating-Memorial-Pages-For-Ones-Who-Have-Passed/?interstitial_shown=1;); and <http://blog.legacy.com/2011/05/16/mymemorials%E2%84%A2-facebook-app/>. Some of these convert Facebook pages, whilst others use the data from profiles to create off-site

That is to say these platforms were not designed for this. These are social spaces driven largely by forces of positive propagation: ‘Like’ buttons, up-votes, retweets etc., that entrench a cycle of homophily and optimism.³⁵ These spaces can become living, open, sometimes competitive places for public expressions of personal grief, simultaneously serving different functions for different people.³⁶ As such, SNS have a different temporality to online web memorials. In their analysis of 200,000 comments over 1300 MySpace profiles, Brubaker & Hayes (2011) conclude that the evolving conversations create and maintain a social bond that situates the dead in a community of their peers quite separate from the moment or state (of death). Patrick Stokes (2011) argues for a distinction between *persons* – as a dimension of mediated identity and anchored presence online – which can survive death, and *selves*, which cannot: ‘Selves are rooted in first-personal, present-tense experience in ways that are quite different to persons, and this allows persons to persist in circumstances where the associated self has dropped out of existence’ (ibid., 2011, p.378).

The public visibility of Facebook memorial pages is the central concern for Marwick & Ellison (2012), based on the features of *persistence*, *replicability*, *scalability*, and *searchability* that are central to SNS (Boyd, 2011). They carried out a content analysis of 37 Facebook memorial profiles to explore how ‘context collapse’ – the flattening of multiple audiences into one – encourages performative displays of mourning and invites the participation of wider audi-

memorials. In addition, Facebook now has its own internal conversion system for turning profiles into memorials.

³⁵To calculate which content is most interesting, Facebook’s EdgeRank algorithm considers several factors, such as the number of comments, who posted the story and what type of post it is (e.g. photo, video, status, update, etc.) and assigns every post (or object) a ‘rank’ accordingly. It also calculates ‘time decay’, prioritising the most recent over anything else, where the present is accorded far higher significance than even one hour ago. Tarlton Gillespie (2010) has written extensively about the impact of these ‘social significance algorithms’ in today’s world.

³⁶What is most inviting to me in their work is the almost off-hand introductory observation that highly public displays are becoming more prevalent in the West, even though they are ‘not in vogue culturally’. Like so much scholarship, research of social media suffers from a heavy Western bias, so I am drawn to ask how other frames of mourning are expressed online, particularly where mourning is traditionally a highly socialised act. Is the increased visibility of death online influenced by the exposure of localised traditions to one another and therefore their hybridisation?

ences. Their study does well in accounting for the agency of users alongside the structural affordances of the platform in a way that is unfortunately quite rare.³⁷ In a related line of thinking, Glasgow et al. (2016) move from personal death into community-wide traumatic events in exploring how SNS operated in hosting support networks following the Sandy Hook massacre.³⁸ They show how the lower transactional costs of social media provide avenues for support and solidarity exactly because they do not involve the huge emotional costs and practical logistics of co-present communications. More importantly perhaps is the context of their study: Sandy Hook certainly constitutes a public death event.

2.4.1 Approaches to YouTube

In the previous chapter I explained that YouTube is the location of the case study work, and the platform has been the focus of several recent studies. YouTube is an internet behemoth, accounting for 600 billion hours of content consumption a month. As one of the first and certainly the most successful video hosting site, YouTube has long occupied the thoughts of media, culture and communications scholars. Burgess & Green (2009) (2009) wrote an early volume of the platform that puts the participatory nature of YouTube at the heart of its success. Considering the speed at which digital technology evolves, it is impressive that it remains so relevant today, especially in illuminating the interactions between contrasting actors such media industries, audiences, and amateurs.

³⁷They also make an important observation about the presence of ‘trolls’ (deliberately provocative postings) and the manner in which the community reacts to them, but leave this tantalisingly unexplored. It strikes me that the contestation of the deceased is a vitally important factor in the momentum and veracity of SMM, and not simply an unwanted incursion that is easily dismissed.

³⁸They use a combination of machine learning and qualitative analysis to filter 32,000 tweets from Fairfield County, USA, following the Sandy Hook and Newtown mass-shootings, identifying six types of ‘social network support acknowledgement’, of which ‘nurturant’ was the most prolific: the uttering of kind words and prayers and other forms of emotional support (Glasgow et al., 2016, p.5).

Gibson & Altena (2014) have looked at the use of YouTube as a site for archiving the experience of grieving and mourning. It is an interesting beginning, but suffers somewhat from only comparing two videos and being rather descriptive at that, but they make an important contribution nonetheless. They focus on the performativity of identity construction within the act of publicly expressing grief in such an unbound social space. Theirs is a memorial site that is no longer morally or semiotically bound: gone are the protective norms of memorial-specific sites reported by Roberts (2006). Knudsen and Stage (2012; 2013) have studied memorial videos for fallen Danish soldiers, and they make an important contribution particularly in their theorising of how the dead soldier as an is affectively and discursively established as an object of communal grief. In so doing, they are one of the few studies to account for both the videos as content and the comments threads as co-constructive of collective sentiments. They also begin to explore how dispute and antagonism operate in these otherwise affirmative spaces. However, their most important contribution is in their operationalisation of Butler's theory of grievability. They show how YouTubers encode the dead soldier's body as grievable through the use of music, text and national symbols of identity that activates a certain version of Danish history that emphasises strength, communality and morality. There is much to take from their work.

Harju (2014) focuses on the comments sections of YouTube to see how the meaning of a celebrity death is negotiated and contested. Whilst the celebrity death is a different type of event, Harju's deft combination of 'netnography' with Critical Discourse Analysis makes an important combination and illustrates how mixing methods should be done. By tackling the comments sections, Harju highlights the interactivity of YouTube as a central factor in legitimising the emotions of YouTubers. Puente et al. (2015) tackle questions of agency and activism on YouTube through a lens of multimodality. Theirs is not a study of memorialising, but nonetheless their model for studying the YouTube videos as

semiotic artefacts that produce meaning is informative and robust, particularly in the ways they illustrate the subject to be interpolated via audiovisual texts in terms of agency.

There is a broader collection of literature that has a more literal approach to YouTube as a space for representations and responses to death and trauma. Sumiala & Tikka (2011) examine the workings of what they term ‘circulation’, by illustrating how violent media images travel on YouTube and how video clips contribute to the formation and reformation of globalised social imaginaries of violence. They draw from Baitaile and Boltanski in their discussions of events including the Columbine, Virginia Tech, Jokela and Kauhajoki massacres, and see YouTube as an extension of the arena in which violent media spectacles are performed. It is important work because it breaks the analytically comfortable boundaries that many scholars build between the online and offline aspects of such events, which is vital to the study of SMM.

Haughey & Campbell (2013) also tackle the question of the celebrity death, which they approach as modern-day martyrs’. They argue that deceased celebrities’ personalities become particularly malleable when they enter the interactive, UGC-driven spaces on SNS. As such, fans use these affordances to reflect on these celebrities’ public lives in such a way that these famous personalities are remediated into martyr-like individuals. Thus constituted, these tragic death-figures inspire reverence and heightened devotion. Furthermore, they argue that the communal construction of narratives allows fans integrate a celebrity’s ‘martyrdom’ into a postmodern gospel that elevates celebrities to the state of higher beings representative of a social injustice in the way they are persecuted by an unforgiving mass media and general public. Not all celebrity deaths operate this way, they tell us, but certain extraordinary individuals do. What we can take from their work is a thoroughly convincing case for the construction of martyrdom figures in a bottom-up process that circumvents traditional gatekeeping figures, be they political, religious or media. What is more, if the mundane,

commoditised, pop-culture celebrity can be configured as a ‘people’s martyr’ in this way, there must be rich potential for tragic, moral and altogether more ‘worthy’ figures caught up in political and social injustice to undergo much the same process.

From a contrasting intellectual intent, Gehl (2009) approaches YouTube as an archive, using his native German in describing the platform as a ‘digital *wunderkammer*’ - a delightful compound noun for a cabinet of curiosities. Gehl asks pertinent questions about the implications for the curation, administration, accountability and risks of Youtube as such a vast archive (and therefore cultural library) relied upon by so many, particularly considering the ‘collective risk’ of the economic drivers behind the platform itself (ibid., p.56). YouTube is anything but neutral, and the role of commercial and algorithmic agents sets the scene for disruptive and manipulative control and presentation of content. This is far from the ‘democratisation’ of information that the rhetoric of the internet mythology promised us (and certainly questions YouTube’s parent company, Google’s, claim to ‘do not harm’).

These are important, original and often innovative approaches to YouTube as a specific online platform, that build on our knowledge of online culture more widely that I have referred to in the previous discussions. But there is still space for further, more context specific work. In practical terms, none of the studies mentioned have approached the space as one in which the multiple modes of communication afforded by the platform combine in the realisation of grief and commemoration. Empirically, very few have looked at the specific memorial practices enacted on YouTube, and when they have they are very small scale. Finally, ritual is a term that appears only casually across this body of literature. None have tackled YouTube in specific terms of ritual, and it is here particularly that this study treads new ground.

Away from YouTube there is other exciting work. Gibbs et al. (2015) frame the use of the hashtag *#funeral* as a form of ‘platform vernacular’ that serves

to mediate mourning practices. They argue that every online platform has a vernacular specific to it that has evolved over time through design, use and appropriation; i.e; the vernacular is shaped by the mediated practices and habits of users just as much as any design features (ibid., p.257).³⁹ The term ‘platform vernacular’ can therefore be a powerful one, capturing how particular conventions and grammars form *within* social networks, and in response to certain conditions. These vernaculars emerge from the affordances of a platform beyond their design specifications. A focus on ‘platform vernacular’ allows a consideration of the personalised, creative, potentially subversive appropriations of platform-specific (and wider) digital resources as forms of ‘presencing’: ways in which individuals define and locate their experience amongst a wider network of friends in a way that is most meaningful and natural to them (see Couldry, 2012, pp.49-51; Richardson & Wilken, 2012). This approach reconciles the ordinary, everyday and intensely social practices of SNS with the *extraordinary* context of SMM without succumbing to the trap of the spectacular (or ‘newness’ of everything). The task now is to apply this thinking in a robust, systematic way to the phenomenon of SMM.

2.4.2 Locating SMM: a response to current thinking

I have covered much ground in locating SMM within a diverse body of literature, highlighting many positive influences as well as deficiencies along the way. The factors at play in social memorialising practices are myriad and complex. This section has been necessarily selective in reviewing the associated literature as it is beyond the remit of this study to explore every potential in this interdisciplinary problem. However, the discussion has served establish several fundamental points. First, in reviewing the field of memory and public memorials, we have

³⁹In a related study on the selfies at funerals, Gibbs et al. (2014) argue that these practices represent the remediation of rituals of mourning themselves as a means of reassurance and support-seeking for a generation faced with the profundity of death yet alienated from the traditions of mourning.

seen how memorials are expressions of more than events but a societies values, ideology, and emotional orientation. These can be activated and made present through cultural rituals of remembrance that serve to sacralise both the physical space in which they occur, and the sentiments, people, and actions to which they refer. The studies discussed here have begun to show how to we might combine MDA with ethnographic approaches to the study of SMM, especially in the methodology developed by Abousnnouga & Machin (2013). The manner in which they lay out the semiotic resources for meaning-making in three dimensional design is enviable, particularly in the clarity they achieve in mixing theory with empirical discussions. But this will always be of limited application to the digital context because it is comparatively such a fluid environment.

More recently, the emergence of spontaneous shrines as a cultural mechanism of grief articulate the need for (and presence of) an inclusivity and interactive social commentary in collective trauma responses. The established forms of state memorialising are too static and slow moving for today's society, and spontaneous shrines demonstrate the need for events to be marked in a manner that is not addressed satisfactorily via the pageantry of old. This also serves to question who determines what death is deemed 'worthy' of collective grief today.

This is the central question behind the examination of death and the media. Moving between Butler's notion of grievability, Boltanski's politics of pity and Ibrahim's work on the visual economy, we see how death is mediated through the media. We now witness the death of unknown others in a manner that collapses emotional and physical distances, re-forms temporality, and connects the individual to a wider media event in highly personalised ways. Dayan and Katz (1992) define Media Events as public ceremonies; deemed historic, and broadcast live on television. They are characterised through their live-ness, the interruption of the everyday, their scripted character, huge audiences and reverent, integrative narratives.

However, media events theory (of which Couldry's version of media ritual is an extension) is limited in its application to SMM for two reasons. First, it is focused on reception: the audience, grief, notions of collective identity and solidarity. This brings two recurring complications: first, it tends to 'flatten' the audience into one homogenous body. The personal is neglected for an account of the collective, and if there is one thing we know about ritual it is the iterative process between an individual (motivation performance, identity) and the collective. The broadcast audience is presented as largely passive, emotionally animated by events yes, but ultimately a consumer of content. The social media space brings fluidity: interactivity, intertextuality and multimodality online references a fluidity of identity and collectivity just as much as it does content. Fluidity means personalisation, impermanence, and potential fragility. The second issue reflects this: a neglect of the social injustice that showed itself to be such an inherent driving force in spontaneous shrines. The obvious result is a removal of public commentary and the co-construction of the event. This occurs because media events reflect, by and large, hierarchical communication: editorial control and curation, official, restrained and 'on message' to ensure maximum consensus and integration.

The events that drive SMM are disruptive rather than integrative. These are not hierarchical, curated, and controlled events, but networked, interactive, and participatory. These ideas were emphasised in the discussion of online media and memorial practices. Whilst the proliferation of online memorial sites brings intrigue, it is an almost subversive use of SNS as active, open, and continual sites of remembrance that most represents a new cultural articulation. Thus the grievability of a death is not determined from official society, but designated from below, through an opaque mix of media witnessing, socialised emotions and political circumstance. In response, the following section builds on the insights and problems set out here, by viewing the phenomenon of SMM through the lens of ritual theory.

2.5 Conceptualising SMM: YouTube, ritual and platform vernacular

YouTube has certain modes of communication that we are all familiar with, what we might term the platform's *resources* and *affordances*: videos, comment threads, up-votes, etc. Similarly, death rituals have a certain form and function particular to the context of public death events: they are transformative, they serve as an emotional outlet, and they reflect a shared experience of some kind. The question is how do the material affordances of YouTube come to form these abstract functions of memorialising? In other words, how does memorialisation as a social practice come to be realised in this space, in this context? What, then, is the vernacular of SMM on YouTube?

I have illustrated throughout that memorialisation of the dead is inherently a question of ritual, perceptions and definitions of which are bound within epistemic and ontological assumptions on the one hand and deep-rooted scholarly traditions on the other. The question of what is (and is not) ritual is as contested as any found in the study of the social world, and I will certainly not try and reconcile this here. It is enough to observe that ritual can be highly elaborate, formal, institutionalised and structured, or it can be spontaneous, organic and personally constructed. So I return to my opening preference for Christopher Helland's definition of ritual as 'purposeful engagement with the sacred (whatever the sacred may be for those involved)' (2013, p.27), and I want to unpack this deceptively simple statement now. The following conceptual framework illustrates how a neo-Durkheimian theory of ritual combined with the notion of a platform vernacular shows the sacred to be a powerful motivating force shaping contemporary life, and one which has the potential to provide profound insights into the moral orientations of one of the most significant social forms: networked publics.

2.5.1 SMM and transformation: appropriation, sacralisation and liminality

All rituals have a transformational element. Ritual both records and performs a change of state: from childhood into adulthood, single to married, etc., and in death rituals this transition is particularly clear: from life into death; from this world to the next. The public death event does not provide a cadaver to focus our attention, and as such we compensate in creative, personal and symbolic ways. Narratives of the dead are built between media commentators and online voices which are often distinct from the stories told in life: negative character traits are overlooked and excused, the dead's social and moral standing is emphasised, achievements and legacies take centre stage, just as we might expect in an obituary or eulogy.⁴⁰ Thus the mediated dead are remediated at the level of ideas. Online, this tends to have a serious visual bias, so graphic representations are a central factor. But where a platform like Twitter gives rise to highly emotive static images, as a video-sharing site YouTube has many more creative resources that might be drawn upon in locating and framing the dead in ways that resonate most strongly with the moralism of the collective.

We can understand this process as one of *appropriation* because it reflects a movement of control away from an established system of power and into another, albeit unstructured and unplanned. That is to say, the ability to form narratives of the dead previously resided with the officiators of state and latterly media institutions, and the advent of social media has altered this dynamic fundamentally. As has been established, a death is not a 'public' death *a priori*; it is not something naturally existing but rather it is constructed by society. A public death is one that resonates because of its moral interpretation, and therefore the dead themselves come to embody those moral sentiments. In this process the dead transition from a 'mundane' victim into a status of 'sacred'

⁴⁰Following the death of Princess Diana for example, little mention was made of the controversies of her life and instead a saintly narrative was almost universally adopted. The virtually complete removal of her lover, Dodi Al-Fayed, from the media narrative reflects this.

dead. It therefore holds true that the visual and narrative frames that form around the victim contain sacred renderings. My interest is in how the platform vernacular operates to realise this sacrality.

Transition therefore operates on different levels and scales, from the victim to the wider event, and is ultimately a question of *liminality*.⁴¹ Victor Turner explains the concept of liminality as the middle of three stages present in all ritual forms:

1. *Separation*. This comprises symbolic behaviour that marks the separation of an individual from a previously understood position in the social structure, or a set of ‘cultural conditions’.
2. *Margin* (or *limen*). This is Turner’s now infamous ‘betwixt and between’: a state where normal classifiers and positions in cultural space are ambiguous, indeterminate, and open for reassignment.
3. *Aggregation*. The passage is consummated, and the ritual subject returns, transformed, to a stable state in a clearly defined ‘structural’ form with associated expectations, norms and ethical standards.⁴²

This is a powerful concept that runs throughout the empirical work.

⁴¹The liminal as a state of potential to change is most literally encapsulated in the Buddhist understanding of death, whereby death marks the transition between two states of existence. In Tibetan Buddhism, the liminal state is called *bardo*, and can last for up to 49 days whilst the karma and merit of a life are assessed, thus defining the form of reincarnation to follow, thereby reincorporating the dead into the lived world. In other traditions the liminal is much briefer: the length of a Christian funeral service, the enshrouding of the body in Muslim rites, and even the length of time for a body to be consumed by carrion in the Zoroastrian tradition.

⁴²In his definition of rites of passage as ‘[those] which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age’ (van Gennep, 1909[1960], quoted in Turner, 1969, p.94), van Gennep identified three stages of transition, but it was Victor Turner (1969) who revived van Gennep’s legacy over half a century later and is now most associated with the concept.

2.5.2 SMM and grief: sharing and performing emotions

Healing is a central function of many rituals (Gudmundsdottir, 2006; Turner, 1969; Douglas, 1970),⁴³ yet death represents an exemplar case because the parameters are so clear.⁴⁴ Death is a rupture, a wound on the individual and the community; it confronts the bereaved with the most profound of existential questions, and thus our rituals serve to bring comfort and distraction. An essential aspect of this involves communicating grief (and the status of grieving) to others: rituals ‘prescribe structural behaviours in time of flux, and encourage recognition of the loss and development of new relationships with both the deceased and community’ (Rando 1984, p.190, quoted in Weeks, 2004, p.115). So whilst the dead are themselves in the liminal, so are those who are left behind, disembedded from their previous lives and not yet reconciled with what comes next. In this sense grief is performative because ‘doing’ grief in this way produces the state these actions represent, and is a key aspect of establishing the *grievability* of the victim.⁴⁵

The resources through which we perform and share grief are important, and the online space provides powerful, innovative and creative opportunities for com-

⁴³One of the most important discussions of the power of ritual to heal comes from Levi-Strauss’s (1963) analysis of a Cuna chant sung during a problematic birth. He explains that the shaman’s recitation serves as a living narrative that connects the experience of the patient to the mythic history of the tribe. The song operates as a link across different levels of reality for the birthing mother. As Csordas and Kleinman (1996) observe, ‘the principle of efficacy in this interpretation is the inherent power of a correspondence or homology between symbolic acts and objects, metaphors, or cosmological structure and the thought, emotions, or behaviour of those treated’ (quoted in Cole, 2004, p.88).

⁴⁴The healing process is manifest in all types and stages of death rituals. Pre-death preparations of wills, funeral arrangements and gifting belongings and inheritances in advance serve to soften the impact of death, whilst sacramental rites are often performed to reconcile the dying with God, bringing comfort to themselves but also those left behind who are assured their loved ones had a ‘good death’. Funerals, memorial services and tributes all serve to bring healing through a communion of grief that is physically co-present, and longer-term rituals such as visiting a gravesite on an anniversary helps the healing process through marking the passage of time, and often becoming a celebration as the years pass. Thus it is easy to see how the online space offers an opportunity to communicate, share and remediate the feelings of loss and grief we feel, and therefore how participation can become part of the healing process.

⁴⁵This line of thinking correlates with Ahmed’s observation that emotions are not so much psychological states as social and cultural practices, endorsing Durkheim’s position that emotions ‘do not originate in any one of the particular individual consciousness’ (Durkheim in Ahmed, 2004b, p.11).

municating, sharing and performing emotions, thereby aiding the healing process. For example, whilst Twitter has a vernacular of immediacy and response driven by inclusivity markers (hashtags, replies, etc.), Facebook is a more considered space with a smaller imagined audience. Offline, actions such as lighting a candle, leaving flowers, reciting a prayer, or wearing black communicate grief because they are embedded in a shared set of rules and practices concerning signals, language, symbols, actions and representations specific to death. These are remediated online in hybrid configurations alongside platform-specific forms.

Much has been written recently about emotions and the online space, and one of the most useful terms to arise is Kuntsman's *affective fabrics*, defined as 'the lived and deeply felt everyday sociality of connections, ruptures, emotions, words, politics and sensory energies, some of which can be pinned down to words or structures, others are intense yet ephemeral' (2012, p.3). These affective fabrics help to account for the 'collective effervescence' of Durkheimian ritual. This is understood as both a central operational ingredient and an outcome of ritual, but is usually premised on the physical co-presence of human bodies.⁴⁶ This line of research highlights how emotions and feelings can reverberate in online spaces and beyond due to specific technical affordances and social practices. A shared emotional experience is central to the success of ritual interaction (Alexander, 2004; Collins, 2004; Goffman, 1967; Schechner, 1987) and these characteristics accentuate and accelerate certain emotional forces. This is further amplified because the roles of producer and consumer of content are indistinct, opening engagement up to almost anyone in an interactive, open-ended process which can be returned to and renewed at anytime, from anywhere.

⁴⁶Or *emotional energy* in Collins's terminology (2004).

2.5.3 SMM and social injustice: morality, community and sacred sentiments

In large part, the argument of this thesis is that the type of death events I have been describing reflect a sacred significance for the people that share in SMM. Thus, the deaths in question do not just reflect criminal acts, but also profane intrusions into the sacred meanings that we tell ourselves about the societies we live in. Gordon Lynch has written extensively on the sacred, arguing that the sacred forms which have had the most profound impacts on modernity are humanity and the nation (2012a, p.73). These are both important for examining how questions of community, morality and sacrality are bound together in the public death event through the notion of a *social injustice*.

My use of the term social injustice here is in the context of a moral corruption of what is held to be right and wrong (i.e., the opposite of justice), and not in reference to ‘social justice’ as a field of enquiry concerned with equality, the distribution of wealth, equal opportunity, privilege, etc. As discussed, the rituals a community performs can embody the identity, values, morals, and myths on which a society is founded, and also the narratives, boundaries and limitations of its current form. So if a death has resulted from a criminal act, negligence, or some otherwise ‘unnatural’ cause, the coming together through ritual articulates a shared moral interpretation of events as a pollution of those sacred ideals. These moral justice frames traditionally operate at the level of nation states where a society’s laws demarcate the ethical boundaries of behaviour: SMM operates at a level above and beyond this. In the online space, if a ‘community’ is significant to the individual it is a question of voluntary attachment over predetermined membership; associations and alignments that are chosen, not ascribed. Again, the question of openness and inclusivity are important here. Participation in SMM is actively encouraged by the sociotechnical affordances of the platform, the nature of the wider media event, and the emotional drivers and motivations of individuals, representing new, impermanent and potentially

unstable groups conjoined through a shared understanding that they are witness to a social injustice.

It is insightful to return to Turner for a moment, for whom the public death event would most certainly be a moment of anti-structure. Here, the ‘rupture’ of the death event serves to suspend and challenge (at least potentially) established social structures in fleeting moments of great potential, transgression and creativity (making our thinking on liminality and community inseparable).⁴⁷ In the anti-structure of liminality a new social relationship forms that is an ‘unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals’ (1969, p.96). This undefined state can result in the creation or reformation of entirely new groups and affiliations. Here, I return to Dayan and Katz and their term ‘scripting media events’ (1992, p.25). This refers to the way in which story-forms (scripts) reflect the main narrative possibilities of an event. They determine what roles are played by whom and in what manner they are enacted. Understanding the scripting of social injustice within SMM is a similar idea to a meta-narrative, but rather than just analysing the broader story this explicitly reconciles the three main ‘characters’ in SMM: the victim, the perpetrator, and the audience.

2.6 An analytical framework for SMM

The phenomenon of SMM is both rich and complex. Whilst *ritualesque*, it is clearly different from the traditional rituals of anthropological and theological concern, blurring established boundaries and failing to substitute them with a stable or consistent alternative. Whilst formal web memorials are an extension of the cemetery (inasmuch as the dead are sequestered to another physical and emotional location, to be visited in ‘chosen time’), social media do the oppos-

⁴⁷Turner, however, prefers the latin *communitas* as it better describes a social relationship free of associations with fixed states or physical locations.

ite, positioning the dead within the ebb and flow of everyday life, ‘integrating mourning practices directly into . . . ongoing social relationships’ (Hutchings, 2012, p.51). The online space reconfigures relationships: of space and time, between the deceased and the living, between mourners, and between events and their meaning. SMM is mediated, in every sense of the word, and that mediation acts upon both the event and its meaning. Finally, SMM forms as an emotionally driven collective whose moral orientation serves to articulate that which is experienced as sacred and absolute. Before proceeding further, I offer a tentative definition based on these observations:

SMM is a performative and commemorative media phenomenon that occurs in response to public death events. Participation is self-motivated but equally collective and interactive. It is marked by open participation structures, sociopolitical contingency, fluidity, and the centrality of User Generated Content. SMM is an emotional response to a traumatic death event, and an active commentary on the conditions of that death.

We have begun to draw a rich picture of the human and technical forces at play in SMM, allowing for the development of the following analytical framework, as illustrated in figure 2.1. The definition of a public death event as a death that is considered exceptional, unnatural, unjust and therefore morally significant and worthy of public mourning and grief separates our thinking from the related field of celebrity deaths. The conjunction of media events with the public death brings notions of grievability, pity, and the visual bias of the media economy, impacted by the proliferation of smartphone technologies. Accordingly, these events are *disruptive* rather than integrative; they are *bottom-up* rather than hierarchically controlled; and they are *networked*, *interactive* and *participatory*. SMM is an appropriation of the public death event and the grieving process from below, through an opaque mix of media witnessing, socialised emotions and political circumstance. This is the context and location of our study.

The following empirical investigation is concerned with unpacking this phenomenon, accounting for the functions of ritual in terms of healing, transition

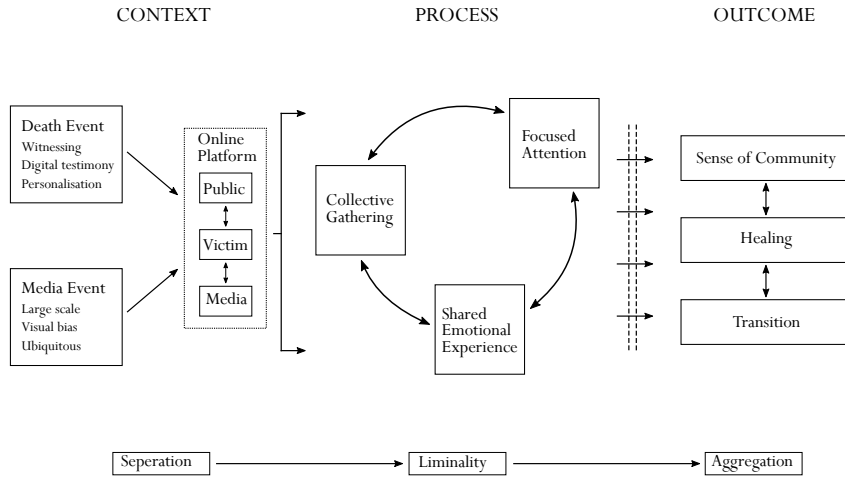


Figure 2.1: A conceptual framework for SMM

and the maintenance of community. We know that ritual is an embodied activity that is shared with others; it is a collective gathering. We know that ritual involves engagement with the same object, event, or action, and a mutual awareness of this; a focused attention. Finally, we know that ritual involves a common emotional experience. Everything we think might result from ritual – standards of morality, sacred symbols and objects, barriers to outsiders, a sense of community etc., – is reliant on this simple triad. It is in this way that we can link between the affordances of modal resources at an individual and interpersonal level and the metafunction of ritual as a communicative event.⁴⁸

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has served to define and locate the phenomenon of SMM in the current literature and, in so doing, formulate a conceptual framework for the following empirical investigation. SMM has been shown to be a conjunction of a

⁴⁸There is a semantic minefield here. When I refer to metafunctions I am using it in the linguistic sense of a higher order of meaning, rather than the sociological sense of functionalism that I have repeatedly rejected. Here, metafunctions refer to meaning potential; as in ‘what can be done’ or ‘what can be meant’ (Jewitt, 2009a, p.24).

traumatic public death and a disruptive media event that gives rise to social acts of mourning online that are interactive, public and mediated. This is the ‘object’ of study, in the empirical sense. The online space is a complex mix of material and immaterial forces and actors; it is networked, publicly visible, accessible, and dominated by UGC. The victim, the event and its meaning are all open to debate, contest and ultimately appropriation. To this we added a definition of ritual derived from anthropology, microsociology and media theory, which understands ritual as creating and/or reflecting standards of shared morality.

The study now proceeds on two levels. The first must take account of what ritual is doing on the level of interaction, representation and communication. Quite literally, what are people doing here? How are they communicating with one another, what forms of interaction does this represent, and how are the victim, emotions and the collective presented, appropriated, and/or contested? The second level of enquiry concerns an account of the social media space as one of ritualisation in respect of the affordances, limitations and resources of the specific platform. In other words, what is the vernacular of SMM and how might we go about understanding it? This is the subject of the following chapter, setting out the methodological frame and analytic strategy that were designed, developed and deployed in direct response to these difficult practical and theoretical issues.

Chapter 3

Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a dynamic conceptual paradigm that located SMM at the intersection of public memorialisation, media events and digital cultures. This chapter serves to explain the research design and analytical framework developed to address the primary research question: *how social media memorialising functions as a cultural mechanism in response to public death events?* The approach I set out is informed by the following set of methodological decisions: a case study design to allow for the comparative analysis of similar phenomena; a multimodal approach to discourse analysis; and the integration of qualitative methods with digital tools for the analysis of data and the presentation of findings.

As will be detailed across the following pages, this thesis does not employ an ‘off-the-shelf’ methodology, and nor does it follow the established structure of many

similar theses. Just as the previous chapter set out a conceptual framework (rather than simply reviewing the relevant literature), so this chapter needs to do more than just describe (and justify) a research toolkit. The dominant line of thinking in multimodal and mixed methods research is that operational frameworks should be developed in response to the research phenomenon (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; O'Halloran, 2009). Accordingly, this study treads a path of abductive analysis, setting out from a theory-informed position that is then built upon and developed in response to direct observation of the data in a continuously reflective process. As a result, the presentation of methods, frames and results do not follow a neat linear progression: much of the earlier empirical work has been folded back into this methodology chapter.

After locating the methodology in the methods literature and briefly setting out the challenges of the research design, I turn to the case studies studies in more detail, contextualising upfront both the events in question and their location online (i.e. YouTube). Doing so brings an important clarity to the discussion of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) that follows because the framework has been developed from direct engagement with the data. I first discuss what Multimodality and Discourse Analysis mean when applied to YouTube in terms of *modes*, *affordances*, *resources*, *materiality*, and particularly the *modal assemblages* of 'locative signalling', 'video' and 'comment threads' that are identified as so central to the platform. I then present a system-network model for the production and consumption of content on YouTube. This is a tool for mapping the communicative resources, their functionality and meaning potential, and the way in which they operate as a system of resources available for users of the platform to choose between. This approach allows for the parallel and synchronous analysis and discussion of the whole range of communicative modes that are in play.

Having set out the research toolkit, the second half of the chapter operationalises the approach. I present an analytical framework for the study of SMM that

operates on two levels: the first is orientated towards the individual actors involved in the production and consumption of content, and the second level is orientated towards the operation of ritual within the platform more widely. Whilst multimodality and ritual theory provide the domain of enquiry, they do not provide a method for systematically organising the data and identifying patterns of meaning within it. The use of Thematic Analysis (TA) allows for the development of common coding frames through different techniques and tools most relevant to the type of data that constitutes each mode (video, text, audio, etc.). Thus, section two begins by setting out the organisation and treatment of each data type, and explains how digital methods are incorporated in both analysis and the presentation of results. Finally, the chapter closes by briefly setting out the themes identified in each layer of analysis as both explanation and justification for the structure and narrative journey through the case study and discussion chapters that follow.

3.2 Media anthropology: locating the approach

This study follows in the broad tradition of media anthropology, and as such draws on ethnographic principles adapted to the characteristics of the observed phenomenon. The world of media ethnography has an often-confused heritage. It loosely refers to a research method in which media production, reception and distribution are studied by means of participant observation and fieldwork. As Coman & Rothenbuhler (2005, p.2) put it:

‘Media ethnography attempts to tease out layers of meaning through observation of and engagement with the everyday situations in which media are consumed, the practices by which media are interpreted, and the use to which media are put’.

Unfortunately things are not that simple. If we wish to restrict ourselves to a study of audience, or the production of content in newsrooms it may suffice to go

into the field and observe these environments first hand. The advent of digital technology has caused a rethinking, but not always a productive one. Underberg and Zorns' recent volume on 'Digital Ethnography' (2013) is almost naïve in its oversimplification.¹ Christine Hine's *Virtual Ethnography* (2000) started an important conversation, but increasingly feels dated, grounded as it is in observing particular communities in bounded online spaces.² Horst and Miller's (2012) *Digital Anthropology* goes further, and the foundational principles they lay out are both relevant and transferable to the problems posed by SMM. The first of these is a commitment to holism and, whilst theoretically fraught, holism understands that no one lives entirely online, nor off. An individual's media ecology cuts across different domains: contextual, physical and digital.³ Thus an ethnographic holism accounts for the political economy of media within our daily practices.

Postill & Pink (2012) build on Hine's position that moves away from physical occupation of a field site and argues for rejecting the dominant paradigms of community and networks to be replaced by routines, movements and sociality. Therefore, Postill and Pink put forward the notion of 'ethnographic places' that consist of clusters and intensities of both localities and socialities. These ethnographic places are not bounded sites, but rather collections of things (people, events, interactions) that become entwined:

¹For Underberg and Zorn, media are not even considered as potential sites for ethnography. For them, the digital is seen as as little more than methods for disseminating research and telling the stories of the cultures one may be studying. There is an almost wilful dismissal of any notion that our digital footprints may have value to the ethnographically minded researcher.

²And for good reason: Hine was writing in the context of Web 1.0, a completely different media environment which was much less interactive (in terms of content production and dissemination), largely text based, and still quite elitist in terms of users and access. It is worth noting that Hine's recent text *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied, and Everyday* (2015) makes a much more convincing case.

³To be clear the underlying understanding is that we are never 'just' in one space, engaging in one activity: in the network society, different aspects of our lives are interspersed and interconnected: our political conversations on Facebook exist within the narration of our daily lives, next to our family photos, linked to our blog, enacted from our smartphones whilst sat at our desk with a window open to the spread sheet we should be working on. The other point from Horst and Miller that is worth emphasising concerns 'humanity's remarkable capacity to re-impose normativity just as quickly as digital technologies create conditions for change' (2012, p.4). Closely lined to domestication theory, this captures the drive to normativity that makes an anthropological approaches so important.

‘This approach neither replaces long-term immersion in a society or culture, nor aims to produce ‘classic’ ethnographic knowledge but, rather, creates deep, contextual and contingent understandings produced through intensive and collaborative sensory, embodied engagements often involving digital technologies in co-producing knowledge’ Pink (2009).

The central divergence this study makes from traditional ethnographic studies is in what I understand ethnographic data to actually *be*, and it is a position that will be disputed in some more traditional circles. For I include the digital markers that we leave across the web alongside what is traditionally understood as ethnographic data (observations, interviews etc.). What Richard Rogers calls ‘post-demographic data’ (2009, p.154), covering the information we post, etc., but also that which we don’t see online, that is a by-product of our performance of the self on digital networks, that connects us unknowingly to others who have occupied similar spaces. These are the methods of the medium, or more simply, the methods embedded online. By accessing the way in which people consume and produce content, interact, and signify tastes and preferences in online spaces, we can build a truly rich picture online social practices. There is a huge amount of data being produced, and a whole host of methods and tools for accessing it, and my task now is to suggest ways in which we can begin unpacking the workings of SMM by combining ethnographic principles with computational tools. I suggest that within all this data we can find what Geertz calls the ‘structures of signification’ within mediatized ritual (1973, p.5), and perhaps, even, that digital data can constitute the ‘thick descriptions’ to essential to traditional ethnographers. In the network society, it is less necessary than ever to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar (ibid, p.16).⁴

⁴Nonetheless, online cultures require an adjustment to the traditional ethnographic toolkit for several reasons. As Garcia et al. (2009) explain, the lack of co- presence means an ethnographer cannot use their social skills to adapt to, interpret and access the social groups they are studying. Therefore, the focus turns to the type of interpretive analysis of textual and visual data proposed over the coming pages. Online, the ethnographer must adapt the management of their identity and presentation of self to the particular setting in new and unusual ways. Furthermore, the type of interpersonal interactions will require a new skill-set to traverse, particularly when discussing sensitive or personal issues. The final observation is that new ethical issues arise because of the blurring between private and public. Not only is there a clear misconception by many users about the public accessibility and searchability of what is posted online, it is not enough to simply take the position that because data is in the

3.3 Structure, operation and sequence

The mixed methods approach set out here is not the traditional triangulation technique whereby the application of one method is used to verify the results of another. Rather, this is a ‘value-added’ design, in which each element adds another layer of complexity and incrementally builds up meaning and understanding (Smelser, 1962). At times, the boundaries between the approaches become blurred, and much of the empirical work is folded back into the methods themselves in a dialectical and reflexive process. Accordingly, it is most important to note here that the operational framework is itself the result of many hours of discourse and thematic analysis. This is particularly relevant to two aspects of the research: First, the presentation of system-network mapping (figure 3.1) that visualise the arrangement of communicative resources at play and the mechanisms through which they operate (O’Halloran, 2008). This mapping underpins the empirical work, identifying key areas of relevance for the targeted study (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Second, is the account of the major modal clusters, as detailed in section 3.3 ‘Operationalising the approach’, and summarised in the modal characteristic tables 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4. Drawing from the Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Norris (2004), and the Social Semiotic approach of Kress (2009) and Jewitt (2009a), these tables are a result of systematic deductive coding across the entire dataset. This involved assessing the resources available to an actor, the affordances of a given mode (both potentialities and constraints), and how these come to be realised in practice. This preliminary stage of the research generated the codes that allowed for subsequent inductive reading of the data on a much closer, theory-driven level.

The decision to structure the narrative of thesis with so much of this empirical work integrated into the methods chapter was for two reasons. First, a linear,

public domain it is ‘valid’ for use and reproduction. The researcher has a responsibility to protect their subjects. This is more complex when discussing online data, because even when identity and sources are hidden, with a simply copy and paste command anyone can do an extensive web search and find the original source.

diary-like record of the research process translated into cumbersome and opaque text. It is not necessary or desirable to record and narrate every iteration of coding frames, and it was not clear how the development of network-mapping would inform the following stages until after they were complete, as is the nature of theory building research. Second, by folding many of these early research insights back into the methodology chapter, the case studies have a clarity that was not otherwise possible. The alternative structure involved another empirical/discussion chapter specifically looking at the mechanisms of YouTube as a ritual space (and this was the model I worked towards for a significant period of time). The problem was a false ‘holding-back’ of observations in early segments for a ‘big-reveal’ at the end. Not only was this narratively cumbersome, I felt it held an element of dishonesty and opened the work up to accusations manipulation, insomuch as I was not allowing the discussion to be led by the data as much as by an imposed structure.

Before moving on, we must acknowledge the drawbacks of the approach I have developed here. The major critique of mixed methods research remains a perception that there is an incompatibility between qualitative and quantitative data due to their underlying paradigms. Thankfully, the binary separations of old continue to wane, but there is much that still needs reconciling. The qualitative/quantitative debate does not need revisiting here, but I highlight the works of Bryman (1984) for the case that the division is one of convention over epistemology, McLaughlin (1991) for the case that the separation is simply unhelpful, and Smaling (1994) in arguing that it is not paradigmatically determined. When we add the digital to the equation, these divisions are even less apparent (and we must be particularly vigilant not confuse quantification with digitisation). This remains a qualitative, interpretive study, even in our qualitative behaviours are recorded online in digital – and therefore quantifiable – form. It remains true that the interdisciplinary nature of new media research means it has benefitted greatly from the exchange and interaction between dif-

fering epistemologies and methodologies, and the mixed-methods approach employed here continues in this tradition. We must ‘follow the medium’ as Rogers (2013) tells us. This work is part of an evolving trajectory to which some make take issue, and others will surely add and refine. This is the nature of pushing boundaries, and this thesis is written from a view that sees the dialectic between methodological approaches as productive opportunities to do so.

3.4 A research strategy for Social Media Memorialising

The thesis so far has argued that online responses to public death events are a distinct form of ritualised memorialising and as such represent a phenomenon worthy of interrogation. Located across the fields of public memorialisation, media events and digital culture, they are at once an expression of grounded human practices and emergent forms of cultural articulations online. Here, the cultural refers to the system of ideas, codes, narratives, symbols, images and emotions that inform the lived experience of social life and social action. This study is, then, based on a constructivist position and epistemological standpoint that seeks to account for both the immediate discursive practices being observed and the background conditions that locate and contextualise such symbolic communicative behaviours through the conceptual paradigm laid out in the previous chapter. The research design is not concerned with hypothesis testing per se, but rather the development of evidence-led theory building. As such, this study constitutes a fundamentally interpretive approach, grounded in systematic, rigorous and methodical techniques; as Geertz notes, ‘we begin with our interpretations ... and then systematise those’ (1973, p.15). The results produced by this kind of study are validated by the rigour of the accompanying theoretical framework, one that is revised and expanded in relation to the

development of those results (Lynch, 2012b; Jenkins et al., 2012).⁵

If the findings of this research are to be both credible and relevant, certain formidable methodological challenges require negotiating:

- Defining and capturing examples of SMM that are consistent, robust and meaningful.
- Employing a consistent method of analysis across varying modes of discourse.
- Formulating an approach that is flexible enough to capture these diverse iterations, yet still capable of delivering credible and generalisable findings.
- Coherently presenting data and analysis which moves between events, inner and outer-semiotic processes, altered temporal relationships between events and actors, sites of display, semantic spaces, and dynamic digital texts.

3.4.1 Case study design: events, parameters and data

A case study design is used because it ‘investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident’ (Yin, 2009, p.16). Furthermore, the features of case study enquiry correlate with the requirements of my work.⁶ It allows for the variable intersections of data and events to be defined in accordance with the research aims, relying on multiple sources of evidence that benefit from the prior development of certain theoretical

⁵Furthermore, this kind of cultural explanation must be acknowledged as being fundamentally entwined with the repertoires of meaning that the researcher brings to the study, and the repertoires of meaning the researcher is able to detect within the work. So whilst validity is defined in the research design, replicability is dependent on the subjectivity of the researcher.

⁶It is worth emphasising for clarity that I take a case study approach to be a design framework for investigation, and by no means a methodological approach. As Stake (1995, p.443) notes: ‘case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied’.

positions that are then further guided and developed through collection and analysis process (ibid., p.17).⁷

3.4.1.1 Units of analysis

Gerring’s definition of a case study as ‘an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena’ (Gerring, 2004, p.341) is used here. The problem of defining units of analysis and setting boundaries to cases that are essentially phenomena is well documented (Gerring, 2004; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009), and as such it is clear that some commonalities and boundaries need to be imposed if a coherent, reliable, valid and replicable study is to be achieved. Therefore, the case study design involves two public death events (see section 2.2): those of Neda Agha-Soltan and Lee Rigby. I take these as the primary *cases*. Whilst SMM took place across a variety of platforms, I have restricted the study to YouTube, and define this as the *location* of the cases. Furthermore, the cases each consist of many different *descriptive examples* or *incidences*, which I shall refer to as *units*: YouTube videos and their associated data event (comments and meta-data).

3.4.1.2 Case 1: Neda Agha-Soltan

Neda Agha-Soltan was murdered by Iranian forces on 20 June 2009. The context of the case was introduced in chapter one (section 1.2.2), and is expanded upon in chapter four (section 4.2). The specifics for data selection and treatment are detailed in section 3.4.3. Here, I simply want to justify the selection in respect of the purpose of investigation and case study design set out above. Neda’s

⁷I use the definition of case study research from Thomas (2011) as the ‘analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame—an object—within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates’ (p.513).

murder and wider events in Tehran have a particular significance for a number of reasons:

- The basic narrative of a young, innocent woman shot dead with no warning and no means of defence is entirely representative of a social injustice.
- The death was captured in two separate videos that were uploaded to YouTube in the hours after the murder. This locates both UGC and YouTube at the centre of events.
- Neda's death is inescapably a media event. The death scenes simultaneously went viral online whilst dominating international news reports. Reaction to events and information about events was formulated between the two.
- Protesters and mourners were banned from physical assembly and Neda's family were denied permission to perform a funeral. This removed the traditional grieving process, serving as a powerful drive to congregate online.
- The regime placed severe restrictions on international news agencies, causing journalists to search online for information and in turn motivating Iranians to upload content.
- YouTube was already a culturally embedded tool in Iran, far more popular than Facebook or Twitter at the time (see Morozov, 2011). Whilst SMM occurred across a number of SNS, YouTube was the primary location.
- Due in large part to the global reach and accessibility of YouTube, reaction was also on a global scale. Neda's death resulted in simultaneous solidarity marches in major cities across the world, reflecting that SMM is not a stand-alone phenomenon but an element of wider socialised responses in times of trauma.

Neda's murder is in many ways an exemplar case for SMM, occurring at a time when smartphone technology was just becoming the norm and on a scale that

was unprecedented in the social media age. The virility of the death imagery reflects the swing towards the visual on SNS.

For a full timeline of events in Iran in June 2009 and beyond, see appendix appendix B.

3.4.1.3 Case 2: Lee Rigby

The second case study concerns the murder of Lee Rigby in May 2013, selected in large part because of the contrasting local context. Again, context was introduced in chapter one (1.2.2) and is expanded upon in the opening of chapter five (5.2). Rigby's murder was selected for analysis because:

- As a soldier whose job is the defence of the nation, Rigby's death is particularly rich in symbolic value (which is exactly why he was targeted). The brutality of his murder, the fact it took place in broad daylight, without warning, when Rigby was off duty and on home soil, and that it was carried out by fundamentalist extremists with a self-declared intent to attack someone representative of the wider society, defines a sense of social injustice at the centre of the narrative.
- Rigby's murder was captured on CCTV and the aftermath was filmed by a number of bystanders. In addition, Rigby's killers sought out the cameras of witnesses and addressed them – and the global audience – at length. There was a rich body of amateur footage of events and the aftermath.
- Images of Rigby's lifeless body were spread across social media and news reports within a matter of hours, constituting a significant media event. The footage of Rigby's killers made for powerful and controversial content, as did dramatic scenes of police shooting and arresting the killers at the scene.

- The internal political situation in Britain was fraught with division, particularly in respect to the idea of the soldier-hero as signifying unquestioning moral authority.
- Rigby's murder took place in a very different media context to that of Neda. In the short period of time between events, smartphones had become commonplace and other SNS, particularly Twitter, continued to rise in use. This opens an important space for analysing potential continuities and divergences in the use of YouTube between cases over time.
- Rigby's murder did not elicit the same response as that of Neda in terms of scale or reach. Both political and online memorialising were much more localised despite the international scale of news reporting.

London in 2013 was very different to Tehran in 2009. Following Rigby's murder there were marches, remembrance services and a series of memorial motorbike rides carried out across the country. Facebook memorial pages were prolific, with one administered by Rigby's sister, Sara McLure, becoming particularly popular. On YouTube, memorial and tribute videos began appearing within hours. This second case is equally representative of the phenomenon in question, and sits in contrast to the first, providing rich potential for comparative analysis.

For a full timeline of events in London in May 2013, see appendix C.

3.4.1.4 YouTube as a site of participatory culture

YouTube was selected as the single platform for the location of the study to ensure clarity for theory building and for practical reasons of data collection and analysis. YouTube is an established and powerful part of contemporary culture and the mainstream media landscape, with a monthly user base of over 1 billion people consuming over 600 billion hours of content a month and uploading over 400 minutes of video every minute (Statista, 2016). The site is completely open

to contributors, from the largest media companies, commercial enterprises and advertisers, through cultural bodies, artists, fans, and non-professional actors. Video content that can be uploaded, downloaded and shared sits within a wider SNS architecture of personal profiles, channels, comment boards, recommended content and heavy advertising. Each (You)Tuber has a different purpose in their use of the platform, and each serves in some way to shape the platform as a site of participatory culture and repository of User Generated Content (Burgess & Green, 2009).

The affordances and limitations of YouTube reflect some of the most interesting and contentious issues around participatory culture: for example, the imbalance between access and voice; the blurring of distinctions between co-creation and exploitation; questions of privacy, anonymity and free speech; tensions between commercial interests and notions of a ‘democratic’ internet; and the inevitable conflict of social norms that occurs when people, cultures and views intersect so openly (Burgess & Green, 2008). YouTube has a double function as both ‘top-down’ distributor of mainstream content and a ‘bottom-up’ platform of vernacular creativity.

YouTube is a particularly unstable object for study. It is defined by its dynamic state (constantly changing, both in terms of content and structure), it has a vast diversity of content that is produced and consumed in myriad different ways, and the sheer scale of the platform creates any number of issues. In addition, there is obviously no single common culture to YouTube and any scholarly approach must be tailored to the particular aims of a given research project. Yet these characteristics are equally what define the platform’s importance.

3.4.2 Multimodality: methodological tools

Multimodality is an interdisciplinary approach that begins from the simple premise that communication is more than language. Multimodality sets out

to account for all representational and communicative resources available to an actor for making meaning in any given context. It is therefore not a *theory for explanation* but a *domain of enquiry*. As such, there is no ‘off-the-shelf’ model that I can apply wholesale, and it is generally understood that specific operational frameworks must be developed according to the particulars of the study (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; O’Halloran, 2009). Multimodality broadly has three approaches: social semiotics, interactional analysis, and discourse analysis (Jewitt, 2009a, pp.28-39), and it is the last of these that this study follows most closely.⁸ Following in the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) most associated with Norman Fairclough (1992), language is understood as a means of social construction: that which both shapes and is shaped by society.⁹

This approach to multimodality understands communication as being performed through a system of choices; it is a practical approach that looks at the options used by an actor when communicating meaning in context and according to their own specific motivations. This allows us to consider the systems of representation that are available (observable and in potential) in a situation and what it is that people are actually doing with them as a form of social practice. What choice someone can and does make depends on the situation, location, motivation and power to access the available resources for communication. Thus, choice systems can serve in identifying, for example, key symbolic forms or modes of expression, which can in turn unlock answers to the larger system of meaning.

3.4.2.1 Modes, resources, realisations and affordances

Whilst a full glossary of terms is provided in appendix A, it is useful to briefly detail how I apply some key terminology here, as there is a lack of consistency

⁸There are a growing number of formal and theoretical approaches for Multimodal Discourse Analysis such as Jewitt (2009, 2013); Machin (2013); Norris (2004); O’Halloran (2008, 2009).

⁹Fairclough’s model is three-dimensional: discourse is in the first sense a ‘text’, in the second sense an instance of discursive practice, and in the third sense an instance of social practice. See Fairclough (1992, pp.62-101) for more.

across the field.

A *mode* is, most simply, ‘a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning’ (Kress, 2009, p.79). For example, writing, sound, speech, gaze or posture are all modes of communication (Jewitt, 2013).¹⁰ *Resources* refers to the actions, materials and artefacts used for communication: pen and ink, a computer keyboard, a linguistic system, visual images, or the physiological, such as muscles for gesture or vocal chords for speaking, are all resources we draw upon when communicating. When a resource is put to use, it can be understood as a *realisation* of its potential. Modal *affordances* refer to the potentialities and constraints of a given mode: what can be communicated easily through the available resources and what is more complex or impossible. Affordances can be both material and cultural, and as such might rise and fall according to the context and purpose of communication. It is these four key terms that constitute the central comparative frame with which the two case studies are analysed and critiqued.

3.4.2.2 YouTube data and modality

YouTube offers an array of *modes* and *resources* according to the role of different actors. A (You)Tuber has all the resources of the filmmaker available to her: music, dialogue, camera angles, fades, cuts, subtitles, narration, etc. Other content decisions, such as choosing a narrative or conceptual style, or an objective or subjective orientation, are also important questions about the deployment of a mode’s *affordances* and *resources*. There are also platform-specific modes related to uploading content: choices concerning keywords, titles, tagging, embedding, etc. inform search and visibility. The content consumer has a different set of modes that might be seen as either an *interpersonal response* – posting

¹⁰Formally, the theory of multimodality has a series of requirements for defining what may or may not be a mode: the textual, ideational and interpersonal functions. Kress (2009, p.88) sets out three tests when defining a mode. See the definition contained in the glossary of terms (appendix A) for more details.

a comment or reply – or a *mechanical system response* – up or down voting a video, sharing, subscribing, etc.

3.4.2.3 Mapping the system

The ‘space’ of YouTube most familiar to us – the Graphic User Interface (GUI) which displays the search bar, videos, recommendations, comments, etc. – has behind it a vast system of choices made by users and informed by the technical architecture that defines the content we see and the *resources* available to us for response. Yet ultimately it is still a physical system with boundaries and limitations, and of course the digital space means that all these aspects are recorded and therefore accessible to us in one form or another, within the limitations of the YouTube API. As such, it is possible to map both the *resources* available to an actor at various points on the production/consumption spectrum, and the discursive relationships between them. This mapping can never be 100% exhaustive, but it does not need to be if it is to remain a transferable tool. It is instead a way of conceptually organising the data to identify key trends, resources, affordances, and points of interaction/convergence between actors, and between actors and the system architecture. In short, network mapping is *a tool for describing the system of communicative resources at play and the mechanisms through which they combine*.

This provides us with a syntax-level rank-scale of *functions* and *features*. The choices made by users represent how meaning potential is *realised* and can be binary (either/or), simultaneous, or scaled (represented in figure 3.1 by $[\cdot]$, $\{\cdot\}$, and \updownarrow respectively). Figure 3.1, a Modal Resource Map for the production and consumption of YouTube, was developed separately to the case study, and is therefore transferable to any study of the YouTube platform. As such, this represents the first methodological contribution of this thesis.¹¹

¹¹Additionally, the transferability of this mapping is not dependent on taking such a holistic account of the platform, and can be used in partial form at the level of modal clusters or individual modes such as audio, mechanical system responses, etc.

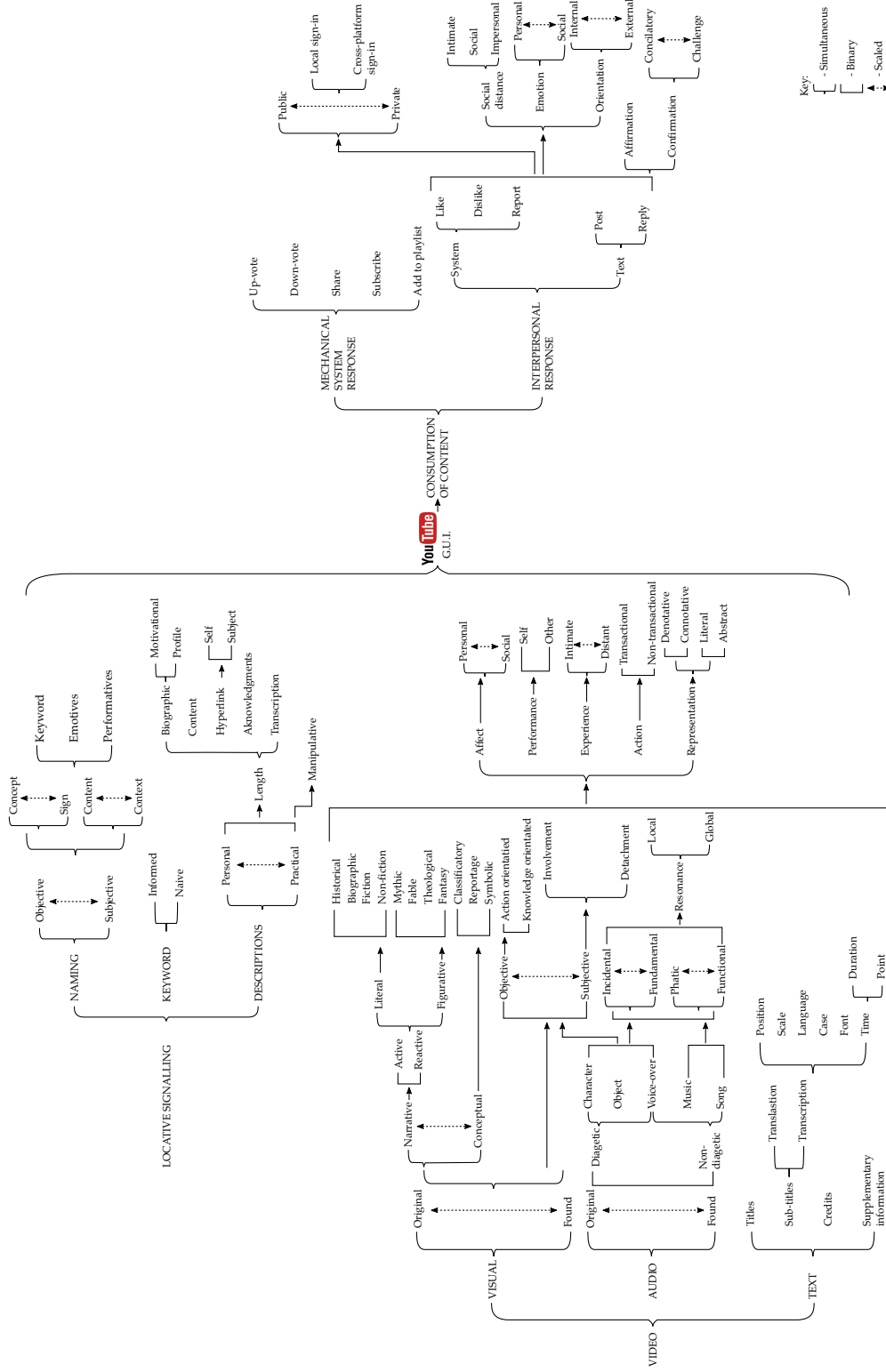


Figure 3.1: System-network map for the production and consumption of content on YouTube

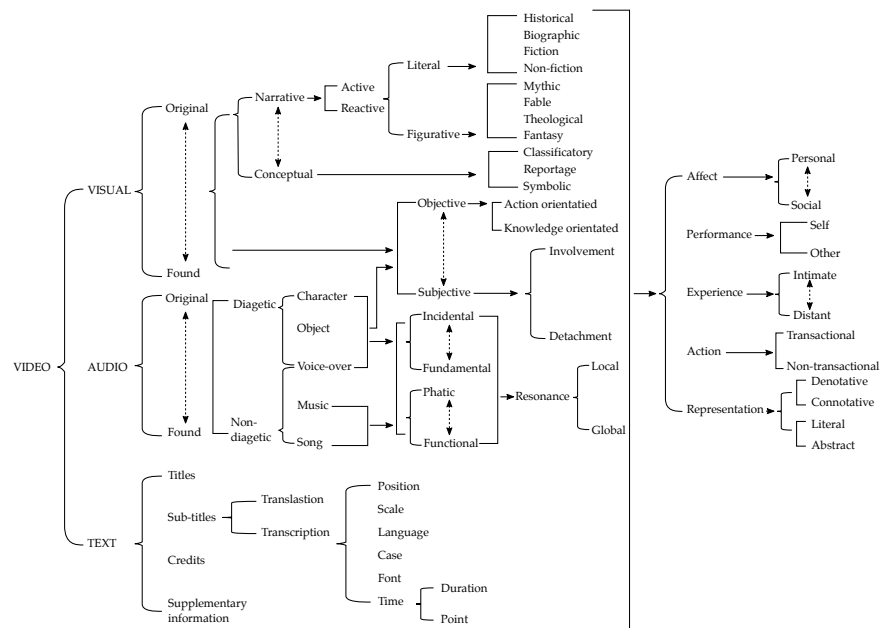


Figure 3.2: System-network map: video

Mapping in this way gives us three network clusters that broadly overlay with the main modal forms of YouTube:

- VIDEO: Audio-visual media files produced and posted in direct response to events.
- LOCATIVE SIGNALLING: Refers primarily to the use of video titles and descriptions. Locates content discursively, temporally, and affectively and is inseparable from the algorithmic recommendation, visibility and search systems of YouTube.
- COMMENT THREADS: An open yet highly structured space for responding to the videos, other comments, and wider events.

Mapping also highlights two very important characteristics of the YouTube platform. The first is the distinction between producers and consumers of content. This may appear an obvious observation, but it is essential to the second, more

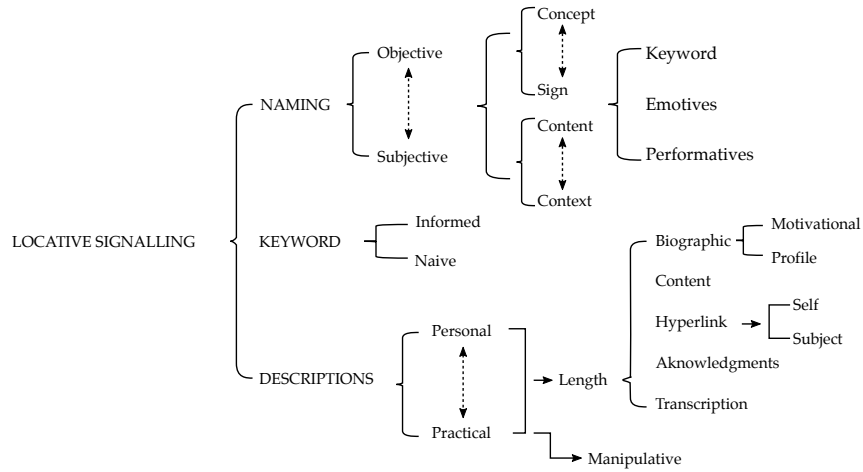


Figure 3.3: System-network map: locative signalling

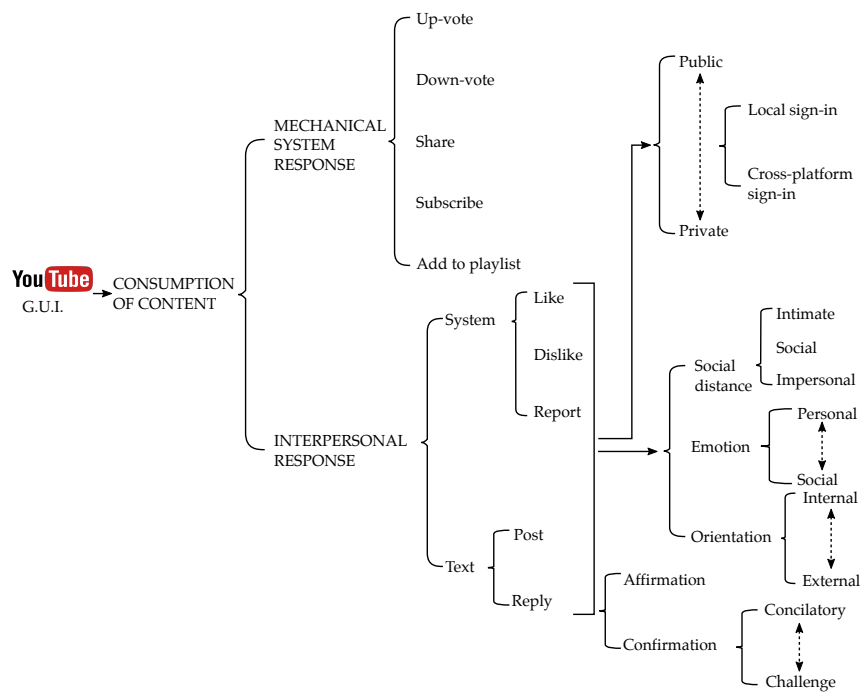


Figure 3.4: System-network map: viewer response

significant observation: that there is a distinct hierarchy of resources and realisations available, and that not all actions are equal, and not all resources are available to all. Thus the seemingly less significant resource of adding a descriptive text to a video can have profound implications for its prominence. For example, the use of keywords can subvert search results and gain an amplified audience. This hierarchy constitutes the video poster as a central agent.

Locative signalling and video primarily concern content production, whilst comment and response concerns content consumption.¹²

3.4.3 Corpus construction and purposive sampling

For the two cases, two separate bodies of data were constructed. This was done entirely through publicly accessible data, accessed via the YouTube API (<https://developers.google.com/youtube/v3/>).¹³ In the first instance it was necessary to identify the most relevant videos. The sheer scale of the YouTube video archive complicates the ability to make any simple or automated representative sample, so a purposive sampling strategy was developed.¹⁴ Based on manual searches and familiarity with the phenomenon, I constructed a list of keywords most relevant to this type of video. Accordingly, using the YTD T Video List tool, I made the following search for each corpus:

¹²I am well aware that writing comments (and to a lesser degree system responses) technically constitutes the ‘production’ of content. I am using the terms here quite narrowly for clarity in the discussion.

¹³This was done with the use of the YouTube Data Tools (YTD T) software developed by Bernhard Rieder (<https://tools.digitalmethods.net/netvizz/youtube/>). YTD T is a simple collection of tools for the collection of data, and does not perform any kind of analysis. Due to YouTube terms and conditions of use, all downloaded video content was kept on secure and private hardware, without any public sharing, display or distribution. See <https://www.youtube.com/static?gl=GB&template=terms>.

¹⁴Following Maxwell’s (2008, p.218) justification for purposive sampling – ‘particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten from other choices’ – I reduced my samples to a much refined corpus to serve the particular purposes of the research as set out in the research question, conceptual framework and methodological design. Teddlie & Yu (2007) set out a taxonomy of purposive sampling strategies. Here, ‘Revelatory Case Sampling’ was employed to find cases representing a specific phenomenon that would ‘yield very valuable information about heretofore unstudied phenomena’ (ibid., p.82).

= [Neda Soltan]/[Lee Rigby]+[Memorial]/[Tribute]/[For]/[Memory]/[Hero]/[Martyr]

At a crawl depth of 10 iterations (one being 50 items), this gave a maximum return of 500 items ranked by relevance across video title, channel and playlist databases.

- For Neda Soltan this returned 2,367 items. The manual removal of duplicates and obsoletes reduced this to 1,343 unique entries, with combined comments of 27,876 and total views of 20,104,652.¹⁵
- For Lee Rigby this returned 2,837 items. The manual removal of duplicates and obsoletes reduced this to 1,074 unique entries, with combined comments of 49,587 and total views of 11,099,787.¹⁶

3.4.3.1 Criteria for selecting a video for analysis

In order to build a true picture of the range of responses, I set out several selection criteria:

- They must not be associated with any commercial YouTube account, channel or organisation.
- They should draw on a broad range of origins: I was not interested in restricting geographic locations.
- They should be retrieved through English language search terms. Whilst this is potentially tricky in terms of excluding huge numbers of possible cases concerning Neda listed in Farsi or Arabic, for analytic clarity, expediency and achievability it was necessary to restrict the data set to English language listings. This did not exclude comments in other postings, nor videos that combined languages.

¹⁵All data accessed 20th July, 2015.

¹⁶All data accessed 8th January, 2016.

- They should reflect a fair representation of the thematic classes of videos I had observed in my early, unstructured research.
- There are no minimum requirements concerning popularity, comment activity, etc. It is important that data are not selected on popularity. The conditions of production mean that ‘visibility’ was not a contributing factor to most of these videos, and indeed many of the most typical examples achieved very low viewing and commenting figures. Popularity cannot be seen as any kind of indicator of ‘success’ or otherwise.

A full list of videos selected for the research can be found in appendices I and J.

3.4.3.2 Data structure

Each corpus of videos and data was viewed repeatedly for familiarity and divided into primary and secondary categories according to thematic relevance. Table (3.1) is indicative of the structure of the final data set.¹⁷

Table 3.1: Data structure

VIDEO	META-DATA	COMMENT
.MP4 file	Username (author)	Comment count
Video Title	Upload time/date	Comment text
Video id	Favourite count	Comment author
Length of video	View count	Comment time/date
Video description	Like count	Reply to
Format	Dislike count	Comment id
Privacy Status	Channel id	Author Channel
		URL

3.4.4 Digital methods

The multimodal nature of YouTube requires the integration of qualitative methods with digital tools for the capture and analysis of content. This is much

¹⁷There was a range of additional data not listed in the the table that was not relevant to the study, such as the use of captions, the video definition, any blocked regions, etc.

more than simply digitising conventional methods and applying them to the web. Rather, it begins by taking natively digital objects (links, tags, threads, etc.), and combining them with ‘traditional’ objects (text, images, sound, etc.), on an equal setting. The following section details the treatment of data and the use of various tools in response to the particular modal characteristics.

3.5 Operationalising the approach

The conceptual framework set out in chapter two identified collective mourning as centred on an iterative process between the individual and the collective body. Additionally, ritual theory has identified three integral elements of ritual: a shared focus of attention, a common emotional experience, and some form of collective gathering. Finally, the field of multimodality provides a domain of enquiry and the development of a modal resource map highlighting the resources and mechanisms for communicating meaning on YouTube.

However, none of these elements provides a method for systematically organising the data and identifying patterns of meaning within it. As such, I apply Thematic Analysis (TA) as best set out by Braun and Clark (2006; 2012), selected exactly because it focuses on meaning *across* a dataset. The purpose of TA is to identify patterns within data in response to a particular question, rather than through preconceived ideas of what the data is in an epistemic sense. So TA is a form of engaging with data that is both methodical and rigorous, and in which there need be no distinction between visual, audio and textual data at the coding level. TA is therefore a way of working with the data in order to understand how the resources and affordances identified through system mapping are being realised, i.e., in understanding how people use the communicative resources of YouTube in certain contexts and for specific purposes.

Traditionally, hypothesis-driven or theory-testing work (deductive) and content-driven or theory-building work (inductive) have been understood as dichotom-

ously opposed or mutually exclusive (Silver & Lewins, 2014). Similarly, approaches to TA have been split between an inductive approach that has an experiential orientation and essentialist theoretical frame, and a deductive approach that has a critical orientation and constructivist frame (Braun and Clark, 2012). In reality, most analysis will use a combination of these two. Following Blakie (2000) and Guba & Lincoln (1994), I tread a path of ‘abductive’ analysis, an approach that takes account of existing theory, which is then built upon and developed from direct observation of the data in question in a continuously reflective process. Whilst not in the business of theory testing in the traditional sense, it is naïve (bordering on the implausible) to suggest that I might approach my data with no preconceptions whatsoever.¹⁸ As Dey (1993, p.7) tells us:

We cannot analyse the data without ideas, but our ideas must be shaped and tested by the data we are analysing. In my view this dialectic informs qualitative analysis from the outset, making debates about whether to analyse primarily on ideas (through deduction) or on the data (through induction) rather sterile.

Finally, it is important to reiterate that TA is only a method of treating data, and this neutrality is its strength. In other words, it is not a methodology in itself and therefore does not conflict with the theoretical perspectives on MDA set out in the previous sections.

3.5.1 Organising the data

The three modal clusters require different treatment due to their different physical characteristics and the different operative functions they perform. Figure 3.5 shows how these elements of the empirical design come together. The modal clusters of locative signalling, videos and comment threads are separate yet interlinked; the tripartite mechanisms of ritual all need accounting for, with the whole process operating between the individual and collective body.

¹⁸In fact, to do so would suggest a lack of appropriate preparation for the endeavour.

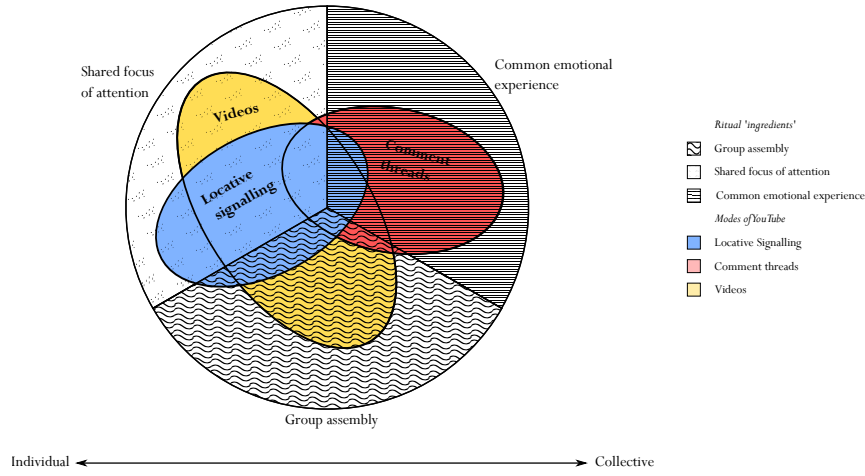


Figure 3.5: Ritual and modes schematic

I initially employed broad deductive coding across the whole dataset in order to establish a relationship between the theory underpinning the conceptual framework and the primary data. This started by assessing the resources available to an actor, the affordances of a given mode (both potentialities and constraints) and how these are realised. Organising the data based on the deductively generated thematic codes allowed for subsequent inductive reading of the data on a much closer and theory-driven level. I undertook this separately for each modal cluster, resulting in a comprehensive and cross-referential account of each mode (see tables 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4). It is important to note that these are context specific: they are developed to account for the use of YouTube as SMM, and therefore do not carry the transferability and generalisability of the modal resource mapping.

3.5.1.1 Locative signalling

Locative signalling is a term that responds to the role that titles, descriptions, and a number of other more hidden factors play in search, retrieval and visibility.

Despite the most moral of intentions, any research that claims to be completely neutral when considering the data is stretching the imagination.

Every YouTube video resides on its own page and has a unique URL. YouTube creates HTML meta tags for each of these video pages based on different page elements. The title of the video becomes the meta-title tag, the description becomes the meta-description tag, and the YouTube tags become the meta-keywords tag. In addition, the first 125 characters of any title are used in search result returns.

Most locative signalling employed on YouTube is tied to popularity and the promotion of content (cf. Welbourne & Grant, 2015). Popularity itself is a result of: (1) content, (2) content-agnostic features, and (3) the YouTube recommendation system. I am not interested in popularity per se, but rather I am focused on how actors use the naming and description resources to locate and frame their videos and reference their content as a form of discursive action, and how this might influence the reception of the video in terms of the comments activity. Analysis of locative signalling was therefore grounded in the operational logics of search and retrieval. Here, the technical object and the discursive object are one and the same, and create a unique (if limited) set of affordances and possibilities for meaning-making.

In a very literal sense the main thematic codes for the locative signalling cluster were already defined due to the purposive sampling strategy set out above (this does not apply to the other modal clusters). The size of the data sets dictated that I needed to either use a computational tool to help their navigation, or reduce the data set again. Choosing the former, I used WordTree, a visualisation and information-retrieval tool based on the traditional ‘keyword-in-context’ (KWIC) method. This enabled the rapid navigation and exploration of the data set, and the production of graphics that communicate relationships within the text quickly and easily (see Wattenberg & Viégas, 2008).

The use of WordTree was targeted on two thematic lines. First, the search terms were selected as they serve to define both the action the video performs (memorial, tribute, etc.), and because they act in framing the victim (as hero,

martyr, etc.). This dual function means they serve as linkages between events and ideas, and as such I used KWIC to focus on the use of prepositions (because the linguistic function of prepositions is to define relationships in space and time). This allowed the visual exploration of how titles become performatives, in the sense that they are not truth-evaluable (they have no intrinsic truth value, nor do they suppose to), but instead are performing some kind of social action (Austin, 1962). At the same time, they remain ‘labels’ in the literal sense of video indexing, creating expectations of what the viewer can expect to see.

This approach produced a comprehensive set of modal characteristics; see table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Modal characteristics: locative signalling

<i>Resource</i>	NAMING:	DESCRIBING:
	Text, hashtag, keyword, embedded links, author’s channel	Biographies, song lyrics, motivations, credits, hyperlinks, emotional expressions, repetition of title, contextual information, dedication
<i>Affordance</i>	MAKING VISIBLE/SHARING FRAMING: content, behaviour, expectations, norms LOCATING: the emotional tone PRESENCING: the author within the event PROMOTING: the self, a cause, a position	Locates victim Invites audience
<i>Realisation</i>	Visibility, search, retrieval, proximity, popularity	Inceptive element (for audience), focusing attention, sets emotional tone

3.5.1.2 Video

YouTube represents a distinct form of cultural articulation, whereby users draw upon the vast semiotic resources available to them across the web, producing content to reflect experience and sharing it with the YouTube community. The

ecology of YouTube involves the consumption of video content as much as it does the production. Videos are multi-dimensional objects, and accounting for all the potential resources for meaning-making would have been a bottomless task. Instead, the data was sub-divided for coding between the visual and audio.

Visual The videos were first reformatted into static image sets. This was done for two reasons: First, I identified UGC as central to the production of content (and therefore meaning), and as such I am more interested in the use and formatting of found imagery over any cinematic analysis of directorial styles. The vast majority of videos used static imagery, so it was a matter of getting a representative sample of the images used. The only exceptions were those depicting a live performance; and in these although the images were not static, the scene was, so the same rationale applied. The second rationale was more practical, as a static image set holds more possibilities when looking for patterns across such large bodies of data (a total of eight hours, 41 minutes and 28 seconds of video; 6:45:07 for Neda, 1:56:21 for Rigby), as I explain below. In order to produce the static image set, I used VLC to take frame-shots at twenty frame intervals.¹⁹ Although the videos used a wide range of frame rates, this interval was calculated between the average frame rate and the average length of time for an image to be on screen. This resulted in 5,042 images for Neda and 1,632 for Rigby.

I then combined computational analysis with qualitative coding developed with the same TA approach. Using ImageJ, I measured the visual properties of the images (such as hue, saturation, grayscale, brightness, shapes) and cross-correlated them with the video meta-data (including posting time, video popularity, number of comments, etc.) and against the qualitative coding frame. See Appendices X and Y for the qualitative visual coding frames. Finally, by using ImagePlot, a tool that runs through ImageJ, it was possible to explore

¹⁹VLC is a free, open-source media player, written by the VideoLan project.

this visually. The advantage of this approach is that most visualisation tools reduce data to bars, points and lines, whereas ImagePlot overlays the image itself. The images can be organised in any order according to the properties listed above.

Audio It was neither practical nor necessary to transcribe all the audio content, but certain pieces did warrant a text-level analysis. Original songs were transcribed where possible, and where existing songs were used I found copies of their lyrics and added these to the body of data. Although almost all the original Iranian songs and poems are performed in English, many of the videos in Neda's data set were in Farsi. As such, I had these translated. In using TA in combination with MDA, I am interested how actors deploy the resources of a communicative mode in the framing of ideas and representation of meaning, rather than a close linguistic reading of the text. Accordingly, the inevitable nuances of interpretation inherent to any translation are not an issue here. A full list of translated text can be found in appendix H.

Thematic analysis focused on the types of audio selected (genres, origin, style, originality, etc.) their function inside and outside the video frame, and the nature of their delivery (performance, recorded, addressed to camera, etc.). I used the code-based software package MAXQDA²⁰ for handling, storing and coding the audio data. See table (3.3) for a detailed account of the video mode.

3.5.1.3 Comment threads

The comment threads are a vital aspect of the YouTube site, where users can comment on and discuss content, and there is very little editorial oversight. As Manovich observes, YouTube comments are not only a response to the video but also to each other (2008, p.41). YouTube requires a sign-in to be able to post a

²⁰<http://maxqda.com>

Table 3.3: Modal characteristics: video

<i>Resource</i>	VISUAL	AUDIO
	Scene, object, settings, actions, movement, focus, colour, people, found image, original image, juxtaposition, opposition, metaphor, framing, narrative, historical comparison, allegory, mies-en-scene, text, montage	Diegetic and non-diegetic sound effects, narration, poetry, performance - original song, performance - cover, found music
<i>Affordance</i>	Production of video content, consumption of video content, event construction, grief mnemonics, remediation, locate victim, locate content producer, define an audience	
<i>Realisation</i>	Lamentation, reflection, performance, protest	Makes experience common, focus of attention (object or action), cathexis (incubates emotion), communicates symbols and scripts

comment, but the requirements for an account are minimal, making it easy to interact anonymously. The comments section is structured in a last-first format, ensuring a constant state of change in terms of display, whilst orientating the space towards a continuous ‘present’.

The comments data set was first cleaned to remove non-English entries and duplicates. Due to the scale of the data set, comments were then restricted to within two years of the original event. This left 6,975 entries for Neda, and 474 for Rigby. One early and unexpected observation was the relative scarcity of meaningful conversation, as most comments were stand-alone utterances. As such, all comments were treated the same whether in a thread or otherwise.

Thematic analysis led to the development of code frames according to the type of discursive act each comment represented, i.e. what people were doing when communicating in this way, what social act is taking place. Through developing these frames, it was possible to identify certain key words associated with each

class, which were then used to navigate the data set using the lexical search functions of MAXQDA. This process was repeated over many stages in the development of the ‘Affordances’ category of table 3.4. This approach also allowed for a more targeted categorisation of the types of discursive resources present.

The addition of time-stamp data brought another avenue for analysis, and ImagePlot was again used to explore relationships between the type, frequency and times of comments activity. Coding frames and themes were referenced across modes and each was developed further.

Table 3.4: Modal characteristics: comment threads

<i>Resource</i>	INTERPERSONAL RESPONSE metaphor, comparison, oppositions, symbols, framing, narrative, veneration, repetition, claims of expert knowledge, claims of conspiracy, invocation of existential forces, violence, insinuation, abuse, encoding, weighting	MECHANICAL SYSTEM RESPONSE like, dislike, report
<i>Affordance</i>	VENERATION of victim PERFORMANCE of grief SCRIPTING of injustice	Argument, challenge, affirmation, agreement, reporting, contestation
<i>Realisation</i>	COMMUNION OF GRIEF praying, blessing, giving thanks, mourning, expressing emotion	EVENT CONSTRUCTION reporting, contesting, describing, arguing

3.5.2 Structuring the argument

With such complex and diverse data, a primary challenge of this project has been how to present the discussion and analysis in a way that tells a coherent story. The systematic separation and deconstruction of each mode and its constituent parts were necessary for analysis but problematic for maintaining

narrative clarity. The synchronous and parallel process of analysis builds an incredibly rich picture of events, but can result in a stilted and idiosyncratic presentation of findings, full of repetitions, loose ends and jumps between time, space and ideas; a simple report on the research process would not do the job required.

In response, the discussion is organised into three thematic areas. These are the *sacralisation of the victim*, the *strategies of grief*, and the *scripting of social injustice*. These themes are neither hierarchical nor mutually exclusive; rather they are interwoven and continuously cross-referential. The categories within are an analytical tool drawn from the data and, as such, any implied causality is symbolic and aesthetic rather than sequential, with the addition of each aspect adding value and complexity to the wider theory. It is through these three themes that the two cases are discussed in turn over the next two chapters (four and five), allowing the narrative to move between modes in a manner that ‘follows the evidence’ instead of falsely restricting discussion for taxonomic clarity. Chapter six then focuses on the mechanics of these communicative forms, interrogating the social media space as ritual space, exploring how the architectural environment and the communicative practices and interactions that take place within it operate as ritual. I am here using the term ‘space’ metaphorically in order to reference the complicated and continually shifting mass of factors that come into play for ritual to take place.

3.6 Methodological credibility and contribution

At the opening of this chapter I highlighted the challenges that must be overcome if the findings were to be both relevant and credible. Interpretive methodologies require transparency and accountability (Howarth, 2012), so it is appropriate to address these issues now:

- How to define and capture examples of SMM that are consistent, robust and meaningful. *This was achieved through a comparative case study design, location on a single platform (YouTube) and explicit, replicable purposive sampling techniques.*
- How to employ a consistent method of analysis across varying modes of discourse. *A tailored Multimodal Discourse Analysis was employed, whilst the semiotic resources of YouTube were mapped in a system network model that is transferable to a variety of potential areas of research.*
- How to formulate an approach that is flexible enough to capture these diverse iterations, yet still capable of delivering credible and generalisable findings. *The development of a transferable analytical framework, concentrating first on the strategies for encoding the grievable body and secondly on the elements of ritualisation, serves to bridge the micro and macro levels of analysis, identifying localised strategies with more generalisable observations.*
- How to coherently present data and analysis which moves between events, inner and outer-semiotic processes, altered temporal relationships between events and actors, sites of display, semantic spaces, and dynamic digital texts. *The distinction between two levels of analysis ensured clarity. The use of digital tools for data capture, analysis and presentation of results allowed for the inclusion of much larger and more diverse data sets than would otherwise have been possible and a clear, integrative discussion of results.*

In the following chapters I apply this analytical framework. In chapters four and five I present two case-specific studies, whilst chapter six contains a comparative analysis of these findings in an account of YouTube as a space of ritualisation.

Chapter 4

Neda Agha-Soltan, the first digital martyr

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the story of SMM on YouTube that followed the brutal murder of Neda Agha-Soltan in 2009. The discussion follows the structure set out in the conceptual framework, beginning with a review of the death and its formation as a media event. The focus then turn towards the treatment of the victim within the video memorials. Moving from the victim to the mourners, the following section examines the strategies of grief practiced by both content consumers and producers, and the particular vernacular forms they take. As users are observed to draw from online and offline resources alike, symbolic, performative, and affective aspects of grieving are interwoven in creative, strategic, and hybridised ritual formations. The final section examines the wider scripting of social injustice and the type of collective formed in SMM. We see Neda's death being articulated as a pollution of shared sacred ideals that binds

the participants of SMM within a ‘networked communion of grief’.¹

4.2 Neda, political unrest and mediatized witnessing

When Neda Agha-Soltan was murdered by Iranian forces on 20 June 2009, she quickly became a symbol of the political struggle between the entrenched regime and the modernising movement (Duranti, 2013; Ibrahim, 2012a; Rajabi & Hejazi, 2012). Her death, captured on mobile phone footage, went viral online whilst simultaneously dominating international news broadcasts. In frantic scenes, a woman, dressed in roopish, headscarf and blue jeans, is seen falling to the ground. Two men rush to her, shouting in Farsi ‘Neda Joon Natar, Neda Natars’ – (‘Neda dear, don’t be afraid, Neda don’t be afraid’). The images are chaotic; there are muted gunshots in the background, screams of bystanders, and fear in the voices. Blood streams from the mouth and nose, seeming to make eye contact with the camera just before passing away.²

Neda was declared the first ‘digital martyr’ (Rajabi & Hejazi, 2012), and her death has been described as the most widely witnessed in human history (Mahr, 2009). These twin notions of witnessing and martyrdom are inter-implicated and return throughout Neda’s story.³ As a news event, Neda’s death illustrates the enduring power of both institutions and technologies of media to focus the world’s gaze in powerful ways. Yet this was more than collective and connected viewing. As a media event, mobile and web media combined with professional

¹Preliminary findings of this chapter are presented in the publications ‘On the Rituals and Symbols of Digital Mourning: The Death of Neda Agha-Soltan’ (Scott, 2014), and ‘Public Death and Personal Media: Performing Grief Online’ (Scott, 2015).

²As of June 2017, the original video had been watched over 2.25 million times with 3,500 comments. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbdEf0QRsLM> (FEELTHELIGHT, 2009)

³Not just conceptually, but etymologically. In ancient Greek *martus* means witness, whilst the Arabic *shahid* (martyr) and *shahida* (martyrdom) have the literal meaning ‘to present as a witness’.

and non-professional networks of production and dissemination to amplify the resonance, virility and scale of what occurred and elevate the passive *watching* into a state of active *witnessing*.

Something of the circumstances of Neda's death created a connection and shared emotional experience between members of an otherwise disconnected, global audience. The sense that Neda's death represented a fundamental injustice was near universal,⁴ and certainly constitutes the type of public death I have described so far. The symbolic power of Neda's death was immediately apparent to the regime, and extreme forms of media restrictions ensued in what was already a heavily policed context.⁵ As the sheer scale of the nascent uprising was becoming clear, traditional news sources were being cut out completely, and online restrictions followed.

Naturally, attention rapidly moved to the online space. This was at a time when global media were undergoing fundamental changes in reaction to digital content. Twitter, at that point a relatively new and niche platform, has often been accredited with an agential role in the uprising, but the reality is quite different.⁶ As Morozov (2011) explains, barely 0.027% of the population were using Twitter, and the majority of traffic around #iranelection concerned actors outside the country propagating a relatively limited range of information.⁷ Instead it was YouTube, a far more embedded cultural tool, that provided the source for most of the content picked up by international news media.⁸ Unverified

⁴Just three days later, Barack Obama explained: 'I think that anyone who sees it [the video] knows there is something fundamentally unjust about that'.

⁵Immediately following the election, the BBC's veteran correspondent John Simpson was briefly arrested for filming in Tehran, and the ABC News correspondent Jim Sciutto had equipment and footage taken from him. The Iranian-Canadian *Newsweek* reporter Maziar Bahari was jailed, and within a week all foreign reporting was banned and journalists were ordered to leave the country. In addition, Al Arabiya offices were forcibly closed in Tehran for a week, and the Belgian channel VRT had reporters arrested, as did the Dutch channel Nova.

⁶In particular, a blog by *The Atlantic*'s Andrew Sullivan proclaimed 'The Revolution will be Tweeted' and garnered a huge amount of attention.

⁷Despite what we know now, #iranelection is still wrongly seen by many as 'revolutionary'. In an otherwise strong study, Mottahedeh boldly states it was the 'first ever international hashtag' (2015, p.17).

⁸Outlets such as *The Guardian* and the *New York Times* not only offered information

YouTube content was increasingly broadcast directly by the main news outlets in a manner and scale previously unseen, deferring questions of validity until after the fact (Stelter in Ibrahim, 2015, p.40).

At the same time as international news organisations turned online to fill the vacuum left by the ban on reporting, the population of Iran had naturally done the same. Despite the Iranian regime having a long history of attempting to control the online space, it faced an unbalanced fight. Iran was the second country in the Middle East to be connected to the internet, it has a young and educated population with over 70% born after 1979, a relatively wealthy middle class, and, in 2009, an estimated 11 million people with access to the internet (an increase of 50% from the previous year) and 50 million mobile phones (Duranti, 2013). The Iranian blogosphere – colloquially known as ‘Weblogestan’ (Shakhsari, 2012) – had an estimated 700,000 unique blogs in June 2009 (Murad, 2009). Therefore, although Iran had officially closed access to some of the world’s biggest sites, including YouTube, an established and educated community of users, adept at circumventing internet controls as part of their everyday practices, were able to continue creating and sharing content largely as before. Whilst direct upload traffic from inside Iran itself was down to 10% (Wilson, 2009), the networked internal and external actors circumvented controls and ensured content flowed freely, if somewhat circuitously. The result was a highly authentic, readily accessible, and visually powerful rendering of events in what had previously been both a practically and culturally challenging context for Western audiences and journalists alike.

Furthermore, in Tehran protesters and mourners were banned from physical assembly. The regime also banned any and all funeral rites for Neda. Shi’ite mourning is traditionally a public, emotional, and – in pre-revolutionary Iran – a highly vocal event. This ban on official death rituals removed the traditional grieving process, serving as another powerful motivator for local actors to exploit

on how to circumvent internal server blocks, but also hosting platforms for Iranian users to upload content directly.

the potential of the digital space. This was manifest in all sorts of creative forms: Facebook posts, hashtags, mash-ups, blogs, etc. Soon a mantra of solidarity appeared that bridged different SNS: ‘We are Neda’ or ‘I am Neda’ in statement posts, Facebook home-pages and the like, accompanied by self-portraits holding a placard with the mantra, or even marking the body with the words.⁹ On YouTube the original death videos were soon found in a vast array of re-worked forms. This is their story.

The point at which content producers and consumers converge on the YouTube GUI is defined primarily through locative signalling. The titles assigned at the point of upload – in combination with keywords and video descriptions – hold a hierarchal bias in affecting search and retrieval: this is what drives content, this is how people come to find certain videos, and it is amplified by YouTube’s popularity algorithms. Here, locative signalling acts to define the social function of the videos as tributes and memorials, serving to separate Neda from the mundane everyday. Her death is important, different, and significant.¹⁰ The name Neda translates as either ‘voice’ or ‘calling’, and this double referent is continually invoked in titles such as ‘Angel of Freedom’, ‘The YouTube Martyr’, ‘Neda’s Calling’, ‘Our Neda’, ‘Symbol of Hope’, ‘The Ultimate Sacrifice’, ‘The Voice of Iran’, and others.¹¹ As well as *framing* Neda with social significance, there is a secondary function in which she is also *located* within the wider set of events. In the local frame, this martyrification is inseparable from the Iranian revolutionary narrative and history of Shi’ism, but this also translated externally

⁹This happened across the social media space, but several sites soon appeared specifically for people to post these ‘selfies of solidarity’ together, like Nedaspeaks.org, weareal-loneneda.wordpress.com, nedayema.org, uplen.net/user/weareneda.html. I would suggest this is an explicit example of the ‘performance of the networked self’ that Papacharissi (2012) describes: the act of claiming ‘I am Neda’, placing one’s own likeness centre stage, and sharing it as widely as possible is a reflection of the manner in which images and symbolic content are increasingly used in the online construction of personal narratives. This is less about contact with the sacred, and more about self-authentication through membership of a ritual community.

¹⁰This is in the context of the purposive sampling strategy detailed in section 3.2.5

¹¹The translation of Neda depends on whether it is modern or classical Persian. It is also sometimes translated as ‘divine message’, but this is due to it being a homonym, rather than etymologically linked. Nevertheless, the connection is played upon repeatedly.

into broader questions of justice and morality that circumvent local contexts.

Through cumulative techno-discursive formations, Neda is elevated above the norm and her murder presented as significant to all of us. These titles are not cries of the disempowered, but rather statements of force and agency, claiming and declaring ownership of Neda. Locative signalling is vital in setting the emotional tone of the space in which individuals find themselves consuming content. Thus, locative signalling is the first point at which we see how the digital space mediates the death, and how (You)Tubers appropriate the event, the victim, and the process of mourning itself.

Appendix B contains a comprehensive timeline of events in Tehran in June 2009.

4.3 The sacralisation of Neda

Having established the conditions leading to Neda's memorialisation on YouTube and the framing elements of locative signalling, this section examines the treatment of the victim. What emerges from the analysis concerns the manner in which (You)Tubers appropriated, remediated and venerated Neda as a martyr.¹² Where death rituals traditionally serve to reconcile the dead as they transition into another (and permanent) state of being, the result here is a continuous and discomforting resurrection and re-birthing. Neda is transformed

¹²It is beyond the scope of this study to fully explore these issues here, but a brief summary is necessary. The martyrdom of Husayn Ibn Ali at Karbala in 680 CE is often cited as the definitive break between the sects of Sunni and Shia Islam, leaving the Shi'ites to know the third Imam as the 'Prince of Martyrs' (sayyid al-shuhuda) (Halm, 1987, p.14). In Shi'ism, the status of martyrdom ascribes a testimony with a truth claim, and with it a significant moral and cultural force (Cook, 2007). Thus the martyr, by definition, has died for the 'right' reasons. The Iranian revolution has conceptions of martyrdom running through it, which can be found throughout Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches from as early as the 1940s (Takeyh, 2006). Khomeini eagerly cast himself on behalf of the downtrodden as witness to the corruption and immoral rule of the Shah. In addition, throughout the horrors of the Iran-Iraq war, when as many as 250,000 conscripted Iranian soldiers died, the martyr narrative of solidarity and sacrifice was essential to maintaining public support and ensuring the war came to embody the revolutionary identity of Iran, its theocratic legitimacy, and the very future of Shi'ism itself: 'You are fighting to protect Islam, [Saddam] is fighting to destroy it', Khomeini declared in 1983 (ibid, p.170).

from death to life and back again, and also into a sacralised, idealised and almost fetishised state. This illustrates the digital space’s ability to collapse divisions of time and space, drawing out and amplifying the liminal phase of ritual, and not necessarily to positive effect.

4.3.1 The visual treatment of the victim

Neda is the primary visual representation in the data set, and analysis identifies four distinct ‘states’ in which she is presented. These are discussed here in an order representing the stages of ritual transitions identified by Van Gennep (1960), but this should not be read as suggestive of a neat or consistent linearity between them. In fact, the reverse is true. There is a messy, jarring switch back and forth between them, both *within* individual videos and more widely *across* the corpus as a whole, the implications of which will be discussed after the states are defined.

4.3.1.1 State 1. In ‘normal’ life: the mundane.



Figure 4.1: State 1: Neda the mundane

In this rendering, Neda is viewed through the prism of her everyday life: a young, beautiful and modern Iranian woman. She is seen with all the trappings of Western modernity. Significantly, the majority of these images are shot inside, betraying the ‘other’ Neda that had to cover up and be chaperoned when in public. We can tell Neda is of the affluent middle classes of Iranian society, existing in the space between tradition and Western-influenced consumerism, enjoying most of the opportunities and cultural experiences of the West, yet

continuously maintaining an adherence to the moral strictures of the Iranian Revolution. Neda was the very embodiment of the contradictions and marginalisations of identity and gender in Iran. This version of Neda is presented with a gentle, sombre yet positive feel as the viewer is invited to celebrate the social and political freedoms these images communicate. In this rendering, Neda is accessible to the widest possible audience, culturally located in Iran, but ambiguous enough to be unhindered by the same.

4.3.1.2 State 2. Between life and death: the liminal

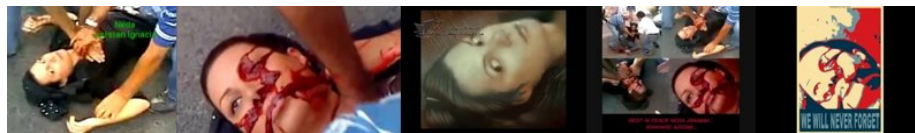


Figure 4.2: State 2: Neda the liminal

Here, caught on camera as the lifeblood literally passes from here, we find Neda straddling the divide between life and death, replayed in perpetuity with seemingly no resolution. There is no final resting for Neda because she remains before us, trapped in the liminal in-between. These images constitute a large part of the overall video content (12%) and only differ slightly between one another. Some are abstracted and overlaid with text, and many have the colour palette exaggerated to emphasise the blood flowing across Neda's face. The images take on a heavily stylised graphic quality that distances the viewer from the reality of the original footage: genuine images of the moment of a murder. Here, the portrayal of Neda's bloodied body emphasises the brutality and injustice of her death, reifying her as a sacred symbol (Ibrahim, 2015, p.41). This echoes the fate of Muslim martyrs killed on the battlefield who are traditionally left and buried unwashed and in their bloodstained clothes as testimony to their sacred status (Glassé, 1991, p.296). This is particularly significant because few women in Islamic or Iranian history have ever achieved this status.

4.3.1.3 State 3. Idealised: the sacred



Figure 4.3: State 3: Neda the sacred

Here, Neda is represented in the traditional Iranian headscarf that is indivisible from her national and religious identities. Her expression is muted, devoid of the smiles that dominate her mundane presentation. These images are drawn from a small number of originals, yet there is evidence of all manner of creative additions and manipulations. The addition of green backgrounds – the colour being symbolic of Islam, Iran, and Shi’ism through its association with the family of the prophet Mohammed – is highly emotive. Images of nature add a contemplative note and link to existential thinking of one-ness and interconnections between the lived world and the spiritual. In highly symbolic renderings, Neda is depicted as though hand-painted. This draws from the local history of sanctifying military and political martyrs in public paintings, murals, and film (De Bellaigue, 2004). Martyrdom portraiture is an enduring and prominent aspect of the everyday visual landscape of Iran, mediating the horrors of war through idealised imagery; it grounds Neda in local frames of political death and sacrifice. The linked elements of faith, national allegiance and collectivised veneration through these visual renderings serve to sacralise Neda and help define the status of martyrdom.

4.3.1.4 State 4. In death: the profaned



Figure 4.4: State 4: Neda the profaned

In this category Neda is physically absent, disembodied by events and having passed into another state of being. In being presented with images of the grave, the viewer is confronted with the finality of death, an affirmation of her passing from this world to another, and some conciliatory comfort that she is now free from the brutality and injustices faced in life. There is a (relative) element of normality in this process as the body is ‘returned’ to the earth, and here the Islamic tradition of burial is adhered to. The distant viewer’s voyeuristic grief is assuaged through the assurance that Neda is at peace and that her family have a grave as an outlet and focus for their own grieving. This category of images is the least prominent of the four. They represent another form of ritual transition, and one that is an easier heuristic for most to decode. The grave therefore signifies a closure of sorts, although an uncomfortable one.

4.3.1.5 Resurrection, rebirth and perpetual liminality

These four renderings do not follow a linear narrative and it is wrong to impose a teleological principle upon them. Instead, what we have is a jarring and ceaseless movement between all four that results not in reconciliation, but a perpetual non-death. Neda’s murder – and all its brutal implications – is held close in a way that repeats the trauma in an almost compulsive manner. To illustrate the way in which this endless cycle of life and death is played out, Figure 4.5 is a visualisation of the movement between these four states across nine sample videos. Each line of linked images represents one video, each short linkage reflecting a movement between renderings. The result is a form of ‘dislocated presencing’; even though viewers are watching in the context of mourning, they are located within the death event. At the same time, through the activation of martyrdom frames, the death event is conceptually opened to include the political struggle, notions of moral injustice, and the societal implications of Neda’s sacrifice. In the unceasing digital space, Neda is trapped in perpetual liminality, always on the edge of *becoming*, yet never quite being reconciled with



Figure 4.5: Movement between four states across nine sample videos

death or reaching a state of stability.

4.3.2 Activating sacred frames

The visual treatment of Neda shows how powerful imagery can be, and of course the visual bias inherent in a video-sharing site locates this at the centre of our interests. The poetic treatment of the victim – meaning simply the use of words rather than images – is equally powerful and highly diverse: song, poetry, narration and the use of on-screen text are all resources available to (You)Tubers. In creative and original ways, Neda is venerated in a manner that serves to encode her (and her death) through a system of sacred frames.

The videos contain a broad range of poetic strategies. The use of anaphora is particularly important, with Neda’s name being deployed as if it were a mantra. In ‘Neda’s Song’, billyseamusic (2009) creates an atmosphere of gentle inevitability through his simple guitar music, singing:

Without warning one shot came
And struck her heart with perfect aim
To take a life that had no blame

It conveys innocence, injustice and, most importantly, an inevitability that removes responsibility from us, the witnessing audience. It operates to reassure

us that this is not our fault but part of a higher order of meaning. It is an arresting technique.

Neda's sacrality is also encoded through historical and religious equivalents. In a bizarre video titled 'New photos of Neda Agha Soltan', iranprotest (2009) chooses the nineteenth-century Christmas hymn 'What Child is This'. Set to the English folk tune 'Greensleeves', a direct similitude is made between Neda and Jesus Christ:

What Child is this who, laid to rest On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom Angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping

Drawing from the same source of ideas, dadadaddyoo (2009) sings:

Tenderly they carried her lifeless body
back to the shelter of her family home
they covered her grave with pure white flowers
and the single blossom of a blood red rose
she is the Angel of Freedom
She is the Spirit of Light

This extract shows how Neda is first narrated as innocent (pure white flowers also representing the virginal), loving and pure (with the return to the family home), and encoded with injustice through the blood red rose. Finally, Neda is endowed with the highest form of sacrality as she is declared the 'Angel of Freedom' and 'Spirit of Light'. The song plays out by repeating the line 'She is the Angel of Freedom' over and over until it fades to nothing. The use of these symbolic forms reaffirms the values and morals associated with them, albeit in a highly simplistic, reductive manner (but such is the power of rhetoric). There is also a continued invocation of God's will, witness, or tacit approval, such as WillyR9 (2009) singing 'God saw the man who pulled the

trigger, we saw a martyrs blood spill on the street’. Sacrality of the event is defined by God’s witness: a powerful technique with a long history. With God as witness, it naturally follows that justice will be served and that Neda is under His protection. These are just a small selection of examples and the way they are realised through the videos. Table 4.1 provides a full set of examples.

Table 4.1: Venerative frames in audio content

Signifier	Example	Type	Source video
Beauty	‘Yes, our beautiful Neda, the world heard your silenced voice’*	Original poetry	Tribute to Neda Iranian girl shot dead in Tehran Iran - Poem
Honour	‘To your honour, and to your grace, To your beautiful face, to your sweet essence’*	Traditional Farsi poem	The Pledge (Sogand) Poem for NEDA Iran Iranian Poetry
Hero	‘now you’re the hero and my heart is grieving for you’	Original song (rock)	Daughter of the world (for Neda) by United GenerationS
Justice	‘Justice is here to say, it’s injustice that’s bound to go, and until our rights are given, this uproar will continue day and night’*	Original song (rap)	In memory of Neda Agha Soltan Song;Shahin Najafi
Innocence	‘You were innocent You were virtuous You had a child-like soul’*	Original song Lament	Siavash Official Video: NEDA
Virgin	‘Virgin Neda, Amir Abad is thirsty for your blood’*	Original song (rap)	Death of Neda Soltan
Immortality	‘The world will not forget you Neda, We will not forget you’	Original song (pop)	Iran Election: A Tribute to Neda
Power (holder)	‘they stealed your heart, but could not stop your voice’	Original song (folk)	Neda’s Song
Power (giver)	‘Come and hold my hands, as I am weak’*	Traditional Farsi poem	Neda Agha Soltan - Payame Neda Poem () - Iran Poetry Poetry

*translated from Farsi

4.3.3 Hybrid renderings

The convergence of online and offline forms is important in understanding the appropriation of Neda and the mourning process through SMM. Here, I turn more closely to the specific, living influence of martyrdom on Iranian identity, which is traceable to the death of Husayn ibn Ali at the Battle of Karbala in

61AH (680AD).¹³ The symbols and rituals of Karbala have continuously evolved over time to serve a variety of personal, spiritual, soteriological, social, political and cultural functions (Aghaie, 2004). It is possible to read the presence of Karbala symbolism in many of the videos, but is best articulated through one example, ‘Neda of Ashura’ (2009). This video contains manipulated renditions of scenes from Persian Ta’zieh theatre (from the root *aza*, meaning ‘mourning’), known for depicting historical and religious dramas (see Figure 4.6).

Here, Neda’s face is imposed upon almost every face in the video except for Husayn himself or, in some scenes, Sohrab Aarabi, a young protester killed in June 2009. Figure 4.6d depicts the Imam’s horse, Zuljinah, bringing news of the Imam’s death to his wife Sayyida Fatima and sister Zaynab. The horse bleeds; the arrows in its neck show the strength it has displayed to carry its vital message. Neda’s face is inserted onto all the family, including the children. She remains stoic and emotionless, apparently neither burdened by grief nor overcome with emotion; she conveys strength, resilience, and calm. Figures 4.6f to 4.6i show the battlefield, and depict ancient cavalry alongside motorcycle-riding Basiji, riot police, and Revolutionary Guards unleashing brutal violence on protesters. These collages draw from familiar street protest scenes in Tehran, but have been reformulated explicitly into the language of Karbala. Figure 4.6j shows Sohrab Aarabi superimposed on the body of Husayn’s brother, Abbas Ibn Ali, as Husayn himself covers his eyes in grief. The final frames show Neda and Sohrab seated alongside Imam Husayn and Imam Ali; the symbolism is virulent. A raw Ta’zieh soundtrack encodes the video with authenticity and displaces any potential cynicism that might arise from the often crude nature of the juxtapositioning. This is not a subtle artefact; it is raw and laden with emotion. It is also inescapably part of the wider Ashura ritual tradition, but with a digital, agitprop aesthetic.

The anthropologist Michael Fischer was the first to coin the phrase ‘the Karbala

¹³More universal renderings are discussed in section 4.5: scripting social injustice.

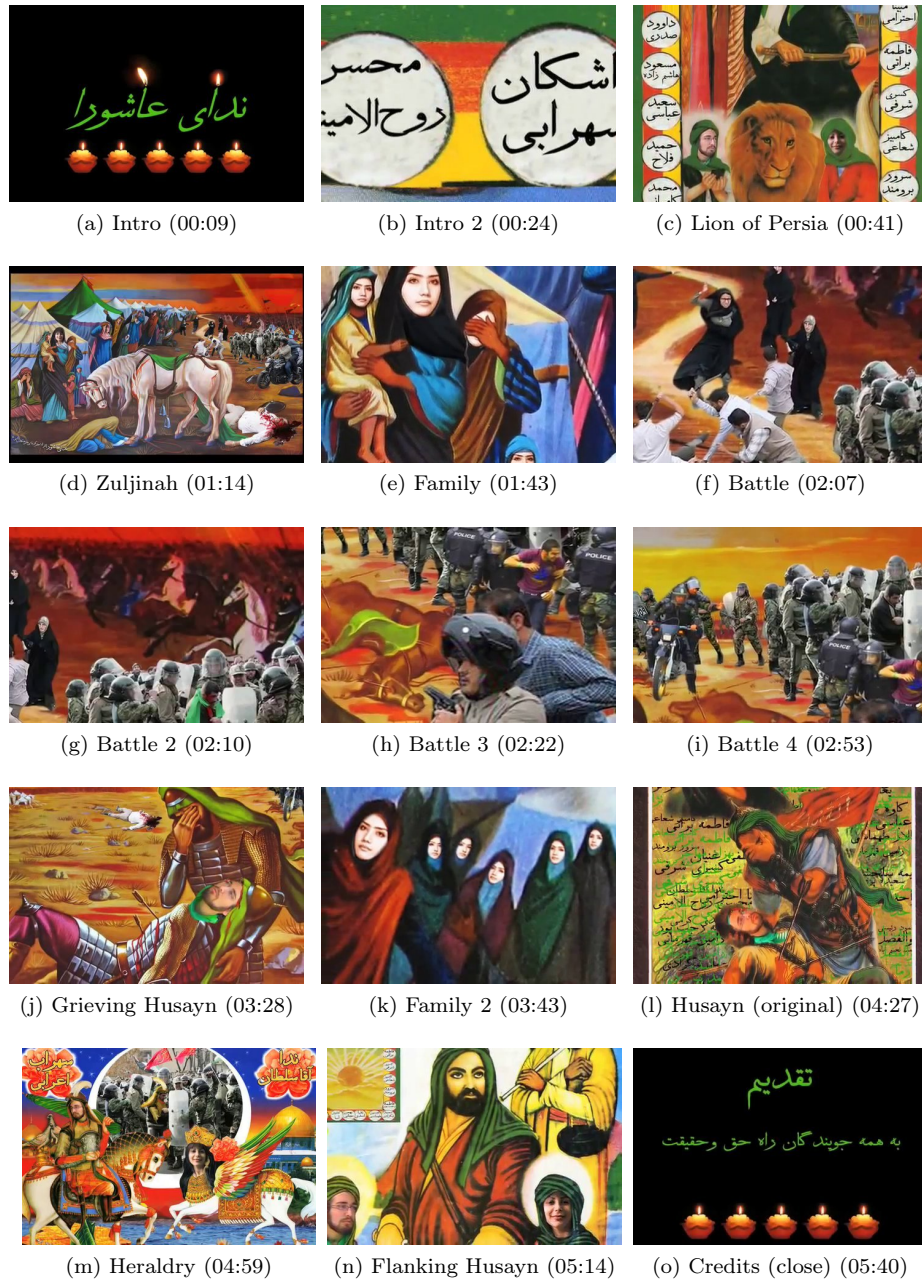


Figure 4.6: 'Neda of Ashura' storyboard

Paradigm’, which, he explains, ‘provides models for living and a mnemonic for thinking how to live’ (Fischer, 1980, p.21). A paradigmatic reading of the Battle of Karbala understands the Shia fight against evil as an ever-repeating, always foreseen battle that will only be fully resolved come Judgement Day. It is a continuous, living, moral and political obligation to fight injustice (Szanto, 2013, p.78). In this video, the Karbala discourse has itself been hacked: the most sacred allegory in Iranian faith is repurposed against the political regime that itself claims legitimacy through the self-same system. As Mottahedeh states, ‘Imam Husayn himself had thus been memed’ (Mottahedeh, 2015, p.50).

Here, Neda signifies an important evolution in the Iranian martyrdom narrative. This treatment of Neda is illustrative of the fact that the power to assign the status of martyrdom no longer resides solely with the political and religious elite: it has been appropriated by the people. The martyr figure that results is imbued with the same sacred history, but also carries the values of the twenty-first century: democratic representation, freedom of choice, freedom of speech and equal rights.

This section has drawn attention to a number of important points:

- Neda’s veneration as martyr within the videos echoes the wider media discourse. They do not stand alone, but are highly cross-referential, complementing and feeding one another.
- The repetitive use of violent death imagery encodes the nature of Neda’s death as an injustice. It thereby also encodes her death as moral and honourable.
- The iterative movement between states of life, death and rebirth traps Neda in a permanent state of becoming to be repeated in perpetuity.
- A wide range of creative visual and verbal resources are used in the realisation of Neda as a sacred form. YouTube affords the user the ability to

draw from online and offline resources alike, giving rise to powerful hybrid articulations.

4.4 Strategies of grief

We now turn our attention outward from the victim and towards the actors congregating, interacting and participating in SMM. I term these actions *strategies of grief* because of the tactical functions they serve. This section observes how both content producers and consumers draw from the resources afforded by the platform in performing grief: as pain, as anger, and as a loss of agency. Approaching grieving as forms of practice and performance moves us away from seeing Neda as the subject of emotions and toward a more abstracted object of feeling generated within this emergent community. Grief, as Ahmed (2004) tells us, is performative. Performativity refers to the ways in which the signifier – an utterance, image, or action – works in generating and informing that to which it refers. So by *doing* grief, the object of grief *becomes* grievable. This section illustrates how grief is a mechanism through which individuals can locate themselves within the affective boundaries of an event.

4.4.1 Performing for Neda: embodied grief

In turning the camera upon themselves, (You)Tubers are able to deploy the human body as a communicative resource. The body becomes a key resource for the realisation of grief on screen. Many of the videos consist of poetry or song performed to and for the camera, and addressed directly to the YouTube audience beyond. Some are covers of existing songs or poems, but the majority are original pieces, often written and recorded in haste. Most are in the English language as an acknowledgement of the dominant platform vernacular. ‘Daughter of the world (for Neda) by United GenerationS’ (2009) is a clear

example, an Iranian pop band singing in a crude Western style with amateur production values encoding a raw affectivity. In contrast, ‘Neda’ Airborne toxic event’ (2010) has high production values, slick animation and careful narrative on two layers (song lyrics and text on screen) that manage to place distance (both emotional and temporal) between performer, viewer and events. These performances insert the self into the wide narrative: they are laden with ‘I’ and ‘You’ representing an exchange between the performer, the audience and the victim with an ambiguity as to who the *you* is: us, the viewer, or Neda? Figure 4.7 shows a selection of these performances.

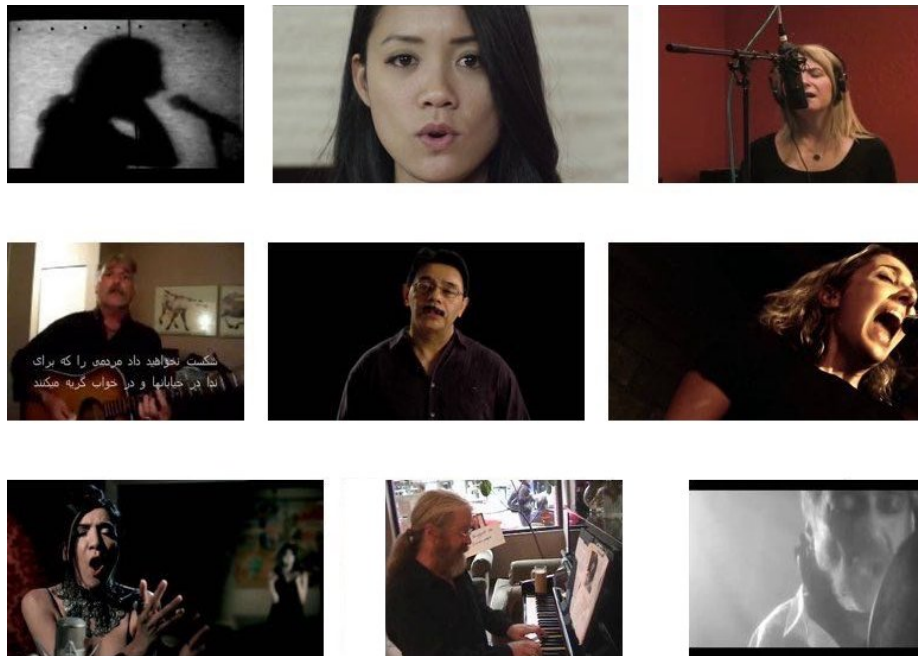


Figure 4.7: (You)Tubers performing music or poetry in memorial to Neda

Deploying the body works as a powerful presenting tool, locating the performers within the collective and exposing a *hierarchy of grief*. It stakes a claim, stating to the audience, ‘this is my loss, look how powerfully I have been affected; look how public my reaction is’. These are acts of grief conceived to be shared, to be shown. So not only does this locate the performer within the community, but it does so in an elevated status. Collective attention is, for the three or four minute duration of the video at least, firmly on the performer who is thereby in

control of the emotional tone and focus of the grieving community.

This locative and personalising strategy is also present in the comment threads, but in a slightly altered form. We see an abundance of identity statements, particularly around nationality: ‘I am Iranian’, ‘I am Scottish’, ‘I am American’, etc., which then contain a sentiment or position statement: ‘I am Israeli it is so sad, why?’; ‘I am from Pakistan and am Sunni. I wish the people of Iran prosperity and peace’. This type of locative identity statement is expressed powerfully by tenzeeee (2010):

I’m not a Muslim. I am a human being same as you peoples. My prayer are always with your peoples and those who lost there lives.. NEDA.etc..etc..
Now you young generation have to finish the dream of those who give there lives for you all. a new Iran democracy .. Finally I again pray for those young brave who lost there lives...

A further device for embodying grief is found in the video descriptions. At least 25% of all descriptive texts contain some form of biography, listing the background and circumstances to Neda’s death alongside the (You)Tubers’ own story and motivations for producing their videos. Much of the narrative has a crisis-resolution structure; that is, by defining what has happened, a literal or implied resolution is communicated and expected, often stated as common sense: the regime will fall, the people will rise, liberty, freedom, etc. will result. There is also evidence of people taking ownership and authorship of Neda’s voice: for example, iranprotest (2009) writes simply, ‘I am Neda Soltani, the girl that was shot by sniper fire in Tehran... Good bye!’, a very literal appropriation of Neda’s voice by the author.

4.4.2 Emotional expression through prayer

The comment threads present a very different set of affordances for expressing grief. It is a much more democratic mode, and therefore the hierarchy of grief is

less prevalent. This is a space in which all are (theoretically) equal, and as such acknowledgements, thanks and reciprocal actions are used to validate participation and emotional orientations. A key vehicle for interactive and reciprocal grieving is prayer. Prayer is a moment out of time and space in which to reflect directly on events and wider concerns, be they political or theological. If we understand prayer in terms of the Latin *precari* it means most simply to *make an earnest petition*. As such, most of the comments constitute prayer in one form or another whereby viewers and commentators are assigning sacrality through doing; Neda is worthy of our prayers exactly because we are praying for her.

Table 4.2: Prayer expression addressed the divine

Name	Video	Date	Comment
Gilbert Aguilera	Neda Agha Soltan, killed 20.06.2009, Presidential Election	19.02.2011 10:29:38	'I thank God i'm fortunate to live where i live, and i pray for those less and/or have to live in such dangerous areas, in general throughout the world. R.I.P. Neda A. Soltan.'
ErrickLong30	IRAN PROTEST IMAGES IN TRIBUTE NEDA	22.06.2009 09:30:57	'To all of you beautiful people on IRAN ... I pray that God will rid you of your evil dictators, and give you peace and democracy. Life is so beautiful to waste it on war, and ego! Lets love each other even as God has loved us all!'
Andre T	RIP Neda Soltani, Neda! Don't Be Scared, Neda! Stay! Neda!	29.06.2009 12:26:24	'Lord God, you are a God that can move mountains. That can change the tide of the sea. Please help the people of Iran ... I pray for Iran in Jesus name. amen.'
RevivalWithoutBorder	RIP Neda Soltani, Neda! Don't Be Scared, Neda! Stay! Neda!	29.06.2009 22:47:2	'Lord God, let your Holy Spirit engulfed the land of Iran. Please interfere in the suffering of people of Iran. Hear my cries oh mighty God... In Jesus name I pray.'

The most common form of prayer is the simple and universal invocation for the

deceased to ‘rest in peace’ (and the derivatives R.I.P, RIP, etc.). This combines with embodied identity acts as people add their location to the statement: RIP from Germany, Canada, Cyprus, the Philippines, etc. Similarly common is the simple ‘God Bless’, which occurs 168 times. Scrolling down the screen, this has a visual impact: the repetition is inescapable, and the sanctity of the space is amplified. God has a powerful presence, and is addressed in prayer 796 times. This takes many forms, as prayers for the self, the people of Iran, or Neda. Table 4.2 provides examples of prayers addressed to the divine in traditional forms.

Prayer is also prevalent in more abstracted expressions, often in the form of a *wish*. The scale of emotional impact is repeated in highly personal terms. Statements of loss, pain, and sadness are commonplace, often referencing and directed towards an abstracted ‘us’. This style of address can express an existential anxiety, a sense of helplessness (which is often expressed through a wish for redressive action), and a loss of agency. Koki039 (2009) would prefer to simply have the knowledge of events removed: ‘I wish I never saw this video. It’s so depressing’. Table 4.3 shows how these take shape.

Table 4.3: Abstracted prayer expressions

Name	Video	Date	Comment
BigBantubazaar	United For Neda	27.07.2009 22:14:25	‘RIP Neda , the flow of your blood will not be in vain. I hope & pray that your people win their struggle’
mpapazi	The Pledge (Sogand) Poem	03.08.2009	‘I wish my life purpose was as great as Neda’s.’
ice69busta	NEDA Iran Iranian Poetry	02:01:53	
	Neda Soltan allsolmusic	24.06.2009 03:04:47	‘i wish it was me cant say how I feel’
CharlesDarwin	Neda Agha Soltan, killed 20.06.2009, Presidential Election	10.12.2009 17:31:41	‘i wish I had the power to kill that fucking coward who killed that innocent lovely girl’
MustafKali	Iran Election- A Tribute to Neda	23.06.2009 03:54:15	‘I wish I could scream and the whole world listens to me’

Another powerful emotive is the expression of thanks to video posters (with

279 direct examples). The videos are seen as powerful, important, and hugely appreciated by people. Whether referencing a deity or not, the majority of these expressions are still an invocation to some higher power or existential force, even if in hope more than belief. These speech acts seek meaning, but they are largely made to activate some reciprocity, be it from a higher power or a fellow (You)Tuber. In so doing, prayer becomes another form of presencing.

4.4.3 Virtual shrines

Perhaps the most explicit visual rendering of grief is found in the construction of virtual shrines. Formal arrangements of flowers and candles combined with an image of the dead are constitutive of a shrine across almost all cultures (Walter, 1996). As Drury (1994, p.103) explains, candles and flowers ‘are of particular importance as powerful symbols of remembrance, resurrection and immortality’. Flowers are offered at death as they symbolise the fragility of the cycle of life. They communicate the need for nurture if they are to thrive and they carry a particular aesthetic beauty in the emotional ugliness of death. Figure 4.8 shows how flowers are used in all manner of creative ways that ultimately communicate the same, simple thing. Similarly, candles are employed to reflect a fragility and temporality. The memorial videos are rife with both, and are often placed with images of nature that invoke peace and serenity, and are suggestive of the greater power of nature or a creator God. The natural world is largely abstracted, free from key identifying features that, from a specific geographic locale, might muddy these grief mnemonics. These are simple yet powerful and virtually global grief mnemonics, drawn upon and activated because they are accessible to such a wide audience. They are also easily recreated: unlike the performance of song, there is no specialist skill set required. As a result of Web 2.0, UGC, convergent technologies, and software (which is increasingly designed specifically for smartphone use), finding and repurposing these images is a simple, everyday task for most people.

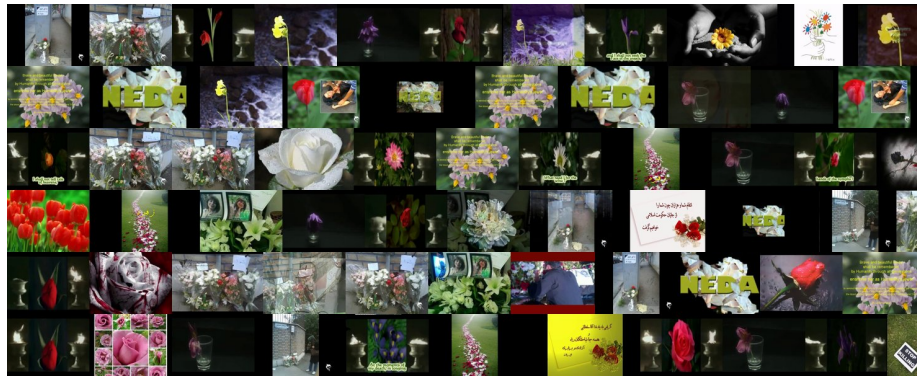


Figure 4.8: The use of flowers as grief mnemonics

YouTube holds affordances for adding signifiers to the virtual shrine that are not available offline. For example, we see images of mourners and protestors spliced into the shrines, both generic and specific to the events in Iran. This creates an equivalence between traditionally conceived mourners and those involved primarily because of the political situation. Similarly, political imagery and audio are added to communicate the injustice inherent to the death event (I will be turning to this in more detail in the following section). However advanced in production values, these are relatively crude objects in terms of their symbolic formulation, yet this simplicity is their power. They are easy to decipher, highly accessible, and create a sense of inclusion. They are very much virtual versions of Santino's spontaneous shrines (2004), and they serve much the same purpose. They focus our attention and communicate explicitly the purpose of the video and, by proxy, the social act represented in our watching it. This is vital in creating a common emotional tone and a sense of shared experience.

4.4.4 Music and grief

Music is a vital aspect of YouTube user behaviour and popularity in general. It is also a near-universal element of grieving. I have touched upon the use of music at other points (particularly in terms of original compositions and embodied performances, above), but it justifies recognition in its own right as both a

resource and a strategy of grief. There are a wide range of audio styles present in the videos that convey different emotional responses, from ancient Persian poetry through to Western pop music. Different styles create a different impact: Shahin Najif's rap song (present in three videos) creates a mood of violent anger and resistance. It is full of urgent questioning:

Streets are flooded with people, men and women, young and old, demand-
ing their vote, time had arrived for justice, it was Injustice that was
bound to go.

Her mother's warning, have all these deaths brought us any change? What
happened to those in prison? Does anyone know their pain or bother
to ask their name?

Nothing will change, demanding your rights? It's only mentioned in books,
all is vain.

In contrast, *irangreenmovement* (2009) uses religious Islamic chanting that is serene, reflective and contemplative. Daniel Rahiri (2009) takes a similarly gentle tone:

We saw your opened eyes in the last moment of your life, which gazed
upon this life

Yes, our beautiful Neda, the world heard your silenced voice

And you flew away with your white and innocent wings¹⁴

Both Hollywood movie soundtracks and Western pop music are used extensively. U2's 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' in 'Bloodshed in Iran - - Neda Agha-Soltan - Sunday Bloody Sunday - U2' (2009) brings an anxious pace and urgency, whereas in 'IRAN PROTEST IMAGES IN TRIBUTE NEDA' (2009), Coldplay's 'Fix You' sentimentalises the imagery almost to the point of sanitation. Yet they activate the same cultural frameworks: they distance the viewer from the original event by relocating Neda in external signifiers. Coldplay and U2 are not the authentic voices of Tehran but are two of the most commercially successful pop bands of living memory. These are the saccharine ballads of angst-ridden

¹⁴Both Rahiri (2009) and Najifi's (2009) lyrics are translated from the original Farsi, and are detailed in full in appendix H.

teenagers, yet this apparently difficult juxtaposition works to universalise the experience of grief and make it accessible to all. These songs increase the *reach* of the death event, becoming a strategic resource for creating both political and emotional support. They invite inclusion and participation through familiarity.

The political is also invoked through protest songs. This is exemplified by Willyr9's '#Neda' (2009), a biographic storytelling that draws its influences from Delta Blues to Vietnam protest songs. In 'Bella ciao, Iran' (2009) we see images of Neda, protesters and tear gas whilst the Italian partisan song of WWII 'Bella Ciao' blares out. The final chorus has the highly pertinent words:

And this is the flower of the partisan
 Goodbye my Beautiful, goodbye my Beautiful, goodbye my Beautiful,
 goodbye
 Dead for our freedom

In 'Tribute to Neda, Daughter of Persia' (2009) uses Sergio Ortega's 1973 socialist anthem 'El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido', the translation of which is heard on popular protests across the globe ('the people, united, will never be defeated'). Barry McGuire's anti-Vietnam protest song 'Eve of Destruction' plays in 'A TRIBUTE TO NEDA SOLTAN WHO BECAME A MARTYR FOR HER BELIEF IN A FREE AND FAIR ELECTION'. Thus, music is a resource that can be much more than the sum of its parts, linking the individual experience of grief to universal ones.

I have used the term strategies of grief to convey the tactical actions (You)Tubers employ for presencing and performing identity. The account presented here is by no means exhaustive. Rather, it is presented in such a way as to emphasise the most prevalent and innovative themes observed in the corpus. Most importantly, it highlights how:

- Grief is communicated and performed in embodied forms that are specific to the platform. (You)Tubers deploy the body as a resource for grief

by turning the camera upon themselves and through the performance of original, creative, and hyper-personal materials.

- The comment threads play in key role in presencing the self, which manifests to a large degree in stylised forms of prayer.
- The use of universal grief mnemonics in the rendering of virtual shrines ensures an open and accessible system for grieving. This has a powerful influence on setting the emotional tone of the space.
- Music is a powerful tool in creating a creating a shared emotional experience.

4.5 Scripting social injustice

This section moves our conceptualisation of SMM out once more, examining how the death event more widely becomes ‘scripted’ as one of social injustice, and the relationship between this and the type of collectives formed on YouTube. We have previously seen how Neda has been presented in terms of martyrdom and how, despite the negative associations martyrdom carries in the Western imagination, this transferred in powerful ways to a global audience. We observe this occurring through the framing of events in much wider cultural codes, as SMM mixes online commentary of political events with the moral boundary-making of ritualised behaviour. This concerns reductive narratives, accessibility and interaction, powerful codes and symbolic forms that are performed through moral binaries.

4.5.1 Neda as a symbol of injustice

Symbols act as mental heuristics: they are cognitive shortcuts that condense meaning into instantly recognisable form (O’Shaughnessy, 2004, p.101). Due

to visual bias, explicit symbols have particular resonance in the digital space. To speak of a social injustice is to speak of a moral corruption of what is held to be right and wrong by a group of people. Thus these twin aspects come together. So what does it mean to speak of Neda as a symbol of social injustice? On the local level we have already established that Neda's death is woven into longstanding narratives of martyrdom, but this is not necessarily equivalent to becoming a symbol of injustice (the martyr can just as easily convey honour, bravery, sacrifice, etc.). For that, we need to look at the politicisation of events. Before Neda, the protest movement was without powerful, personalised symbols, restricted to small acts of defiance. The vacuum of political expression is reflected in the appropriation of 1979 revolutionary slogans (Gheytanchi, 2010). In a process Hirsch calls 'postmemory', the youth movement authenticated its struggle by mobilising their parents' traumas (Hirsch, 1997, in Naghibi, 2011, p.60). The emergence of the death-scene footage was seized upon by a movement hungry for iconic imagery, and we have seen how Neda's likeness moved from referent to sacred symbol, directing the gaze in a manner that was both fetishised and politicised.

Whilst this process is easily decipherable in the local frame, it is fair to observe that Neda could have been problematic for a Western audience to rally behind. Yet this unknown woman became a largely unquestioned object of grief and sympathy for a worldwide audience. This occurred largely because the variety of depictions of Neda had such a range that (You)Tubers could self-select a version they most identified with (see section 4.3). Neda also falls into the classic mould of female vulnerability that awaits a saviour's rescue. She is beautiful, female, young, exotic: a quintessential fairy tale heroine. There are two particular reformulations that illustrate how Neda is assimilated into external narratives of freedom, justice and resistance. The first sees Neda reincarnated as the Statue of Liberty, that iconic symbol of Western freedom (figure 4.9). Neda not only bears the crown (representing the sun, the seven seas and the seven continents



Figure 4.9: Neda reimagined as the Statue of Liberty

as the means to bring liberty to the world) and *tabula ansata* (a tablet evoking the rule of law) of Lady Liberty, but holds aloft a mobile phone in place of a flaming torch as the means to enlighten the world in the ways of freedom and democracy (SleepingGypsy8, 2009). This also has echoes of the Lion and Sun (Šīro Xoršīd), the emblem of Iran that was part of the national flag until 1980 and which signals strength, resilience and the mixture of ancient history and modern identity.

The second reimagining is more contemporary. Here, Neda’s bloodied face is depicted in the graphic colours and style of Shepard Fairey’s ‘Obey Giant’ (1989): a symbol of anti-authoritarianism, counter-culture and street level protests (see figure 4.10). The ‘Obey’ imagery has been deployed in the Occupy Wall Street protest movement, by Anonymous, and most prominently reworked by Fairey as Hope (2008) in response to Barack Obama’s presidential campaign. The ‘Obey Giant’ is one of the most iconic countercultural symbols of today, and fits into a long line of left-wing aesthetics. Deploying Neda’s image this way both politicises and, paradoxically, trivialises participation because of the commercialisation of these images. Nonetheless, Neda is reformed as a countercultural icon in a contemporary, Westernised tradition. We see Neda become ‘flattened’ into a reductive symbol, strewn of personal nuance. In other words, Neda moves from a referential figure to a symbolic one; as Assman and Assman put it, ‘what had started as an image *of* ends up as an image *for*’ (2010, p.235, italics added). This is appropriation in the extreme, where the commemoration of Neda

commodifies her into a global icon in a manner resonant with Che Guevara or Nelson Mandela. The difference, as is so often the case with the digital realm, is the speed and scale with which it takes place.



Figure 4.10: Graphic renderings of Neda and their source

Neda becomes embedded in a wider history of global protest through a number of strategies. One of the most prolific symbolic images in the data set is the raised hand. It has produced some of the most iconic images of recent history, such as US athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos performing the Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics and Nelson Mandela's raised fist on his release from prison. The clenched fist signifies unity and the strength of collective action: 'United we stand' it tells us. It is primarily a unifying symbol that works by drawing upon a history of public solidarity, defiance and strength that is romanticised in folk memory. The outstretched hand is also present, a gesture that communicates both the request for and proffering of help indicative of power dynamics (the powerful to the powerless). This imagery invokes biblical references to God bringing life into the world, offering his hand in salvation and redemption.

We also see the hand with two raised fingers meaning victory, peace, or both.¹⁵ The double meaning of the sign may well have added to its popularity, since a simple twist of the hand presents a mocking insult to the enemy. The open hand has another layer of complexity in Middle Eastern and North African culture: the Hamsa (Arabic, Hamsah, or Hand of Fatima) is a palm-shaped

¹⁵This first entered common usage during World War II via the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the 'V for Victory' campaign.



Figure 4.11: Hands raised in various symbolic gestures are prevalent

symbol of protection, blessing, power and strength. Several videos use an image of a football player with his hands over his eyes. These images are notable because they convey a sense of shame, rather than the strength and defiance the hand normally represents. They read as though the player cannot look at the country he represents. It is powerful because of the accessibility of football and the inescapable tribalism of the international game: it is one of the few realms of social life where naked, uncritical nationalist pride is not only welcome but actively encouraged. These universal signifiers do two things: they foster a sense of inclusion, and they establish Neda as representative of shared moral ideals, reaching out beyond the temporal, cultural and physical boundaries of Iran.

4.5.2 Victim and perpetrators

Neda's death is firmly cast in a framework of revolutionary struggle. Revolution is experienced as a matter of life and death, with victory representing the final triumph of good over evil. An important narrative tool is defining those responsible, as scripting injustice requires both protagonist and antagonist. This

is critical in preventing the hero narrative from being reduced to victimhood. Here, this is a relatively simple task because the blame lies so clearly with the regime. Nonetheless, when Sussan Deyhim (2009) sings ‘before Ahmadinejad was Saddam Hussein, King Jong Il, Milosevic, and of course, the Devil’, the equivalencies with these historical characters is powerful. Those responsible for Neda’s death are repeatedly referred to in binary terms, as table 4.4 illustrates.

Table 4.4: Articulating ‘Evil’

Name	Video	Date	Comment
Kieran darragh	Neda Agha Soltan, killed 20.06.2009, Presidential Election	13.06.2010 04:29:57	This evil regime will suffer....the sooner,the better,you cant stop us from seeing your supression,may you rot in hell!!
Jack Frost	Neda ye Iran	22.06.2009 00:42:13	RIP Neda,may your soul live on...Remove the Dictator AKA Axis of Evil
StalinTerror	RIP Neda Soltani, Neda! Don't Be Scared, Neda! Stay! Neda!	29.06.2009 17:12:43	We must stand together against this evil who pretend to be religious.
tyRONasaur	SONG FOR NEDA original music by Greg V. In honor	11.09.2010 14:23:08	A beautiful woman with a courageous spirit. She died because evil men feared what she represented.

The manner in which the street scenes from the unrest in Tehran is represented also performs these distinctions. Figure 4.12 presents composites of those images coded as depicting ‘violence’ against those coded as ‘protest’. On first assessment, they are rather similar images of crowds, but closer consideration reveals more. We realise that images of protest are bathed in the sacred green of Islam, whilst those of violence are coloured with the orange and red of flames, and traditionally associated with the devil. Accordingly, these categories of violence vs protest translate to active and passive stances. The powerlessness of victims of violence is juxtaposed with the agency of protesters, violence against the people, and resistance by the people. Vitally, the two must be presented together otherwise the moral distinction is lost.



(a) Violence



(b) Protest

Figure 4.12: Images of violence vs protest

Table 4.5: Sacred-profane classifiers

VICTIM FRAMEWORK		PERPETRATOR FRAMEWORK	
SACRED MOVEMENT	PROFANE REGIME	SACRED REGIME	PROFANE PROTESTORS
Peaceful	Violent	Religious	Secular
Righteous	Immoral	Righteous	Immoral
Just	Unjust	Indigenous	External/foreign
Natural	Corrupted	Stability	Chaos
Inevitable	Temporary	Existential	Worldly
Authentic	Artificial	Majority	Minority
Common	Elite	Safe	Dangerous
Modern	Primitive	Enlightened	Barbaric
Rational	Self-interest	Enlightened	Naïve
Freedom	Repression	Deliberate	Irrational
Democracy	Dictator	Selfless	Selfish
Equality	Inequality	Society	Individual
Intelligent	Ignorant	God	Man
Spontaneous	Calculated	Humble	Arrogant

The performance of binary oppositions becomes increasingly clear. Table 4.5 catalogues these oppositions, as identified across all the communicative modes. It illustrates the interwoven nature of these disparate elements on the one hand, and also shows the startling similarities between the two on the other. As is the nature of such a reductive, emotional system, the moral categories that the protesters define is not far from those employed by the regime itself. The difference is the relative weighting of one over the other, and the ability of the opposing groups to activate these frames in the minds of the public and through the various forms of media. That is to say, the all-powerful Iranian regime has lost control of the meta-narrative in a society where it has reigned supreme for decades. Once again, this highlights how, in appropriating the mourning process, networked publics are altering the power dynamics of established systems of symbolic production.

4.5.3 A communion of grief

For the distant viewer, witnessing Neda's death cannot be dismissed as 'one of those things' because, by implication, we are then without agency: all is

lost. Thus solidarity is not a choice but a moral imperative. This system of oppositions make it possible for (You)Tubers to clearly articulate this. Their position becomes much more accessible and compatible with ‘outside’ actors: grief for Neda is equated with grief for an attack on human rights (and/or national rights).

This sense of injustice is therefore at the heart of how we can conceptualise the collective gathered in SMM. The emotional interactivity and reciprocity that is so prevalent in the comment threads is driven by a shared sense of moral purpose that circumvents or simply ignores established cultural, emotional and spatial divisions. This social alignment is volatile and impermanent, and disruptions are common. But the comments are also extremely strong, honest and earnest at the time of expression. This seemingly simple observation that the (You)Tubers who gathered to mourn Neda do so in moral alignment shows how important the notion of liminality is. Just as Neda undergoes a process of transformation, so does the average (You)Tuber. Taken alongside Neda’s sacralisation and the myriad ways that grief is performed, the sense of injustice adds to the sense that we are witnessing a communion of grief in SMM.

This section has served to illustrate the vital role that the scripting of injustice plays in SMM:

- Neda’s likeness becomes elevated to the status of global icon, continuing in a tradition of enduring images that move into pop cultural commodities.
- The political events in Iran are universalised through established iconography, symbols and a range of global events that makes their interpretation simple and inclusive.
- The whole range of communicative resources at play on the platform work together in articulating binary frames of meaning.
- The moral framework that sits behind this sense of injustice is indicative of SMM constituting a communion of grief.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has covered much ground and at times imposed structures that, whilst helpful for creating a clear discussion, do not operate in such distinct fields. What is abundantly clear is that in the open, interactive space of YouTube there are a multitude of behaviours that can be read in an equally diverse number of ways. The chapter began by explaining how treatment of the victim within SMM is a process of sacralisation in which Neda is assigned the elevated moral status of martyrdom. This is reflective of the wider mediation of the death event, but SMM is a significant part. As Hughes (Hughes, 1993, p.328) explains, the rank of martyr is given to those ‘who die in such a manner as to excite the sympathy of mankind’, and Neda certainly qualifies. Neda’s martyrdom is an amalgamation of online and offline influences, but the visual treatment is central. As Varzi observes, ‘martyrdom is meaningless without memorialisation, and memorialisation is not possible without a photograph’ (2006, p.26). Leach (1976) pioneered the idea that ritual is an ‘intellectual operation in which categories affirmed as the “cultural order” can be transgressed’. This is what we see here: the utterly ‘normal’ Neda is assigned a set of characteristics not only in juxtaposition with her lived reality, but unattainable by any mortal human. These are supra-natural characteristics, befitting gods, saints and angels, with whom Neda is repeatedly equated. It is exactly this separation from the realm of reality that allows us to comprehend such an unjust, terrifying, illogical and irrational event.

Whilst this narrative is firmly grounded in Islamic theology, Neda’s death imagery holds a universal accessibility. The explicit conditions of death in their most reductive form – a beautiful, young, defenceless woman struck down by a cowardly, distant, faceless killer in league with an evil, corrupt, power-hungry regime – are present in myths and fairytales across the world. As a martyr Neda is understood to be direct witness to the power of God, bridging the worlds of Heaven and Earth, and assured of her place in paradise because of the morality

of her death. Thus Neda's liminal state between life and death communicates all these mythic, tragic, heroic, and ultimately redemptive cultural codes to a point that is accessible and poignant to a global audience.

The creation of virtual shrines, the deployment of the human body, the use of music – original or otherwise – and stylised forms of prayer were all observed as key *strategies of grief* that presence individuals and formulate the grievable body. These are the building blocks of ritual that focus attention and create a common emotional experience. More broadly, we see how Neda's death was appropriated by a wider audience and her likeness reformulated again as a global countercultural icon. The twin narratives of martyr and political resistance are continually activated through a variety of symbolic mechanisms that inscribe the viewer and/or performer into a communion of grief. In doing so, the viewer is interpolated as a member of a community that shares the same values; a 'we' is constructed through the activation of codes that emphasise similarity and commonality, and those codes that reflect conflict and disagreement are downplayed, ignored or resolved quickly.

Chapter 5

Lee Rigby, the soldier-hero

5.1 Introduction

This chapter turns to the events in London in 2013, when killers claiming inspiration from radical Islamic ideology murdered Fusilier Lee Rigby. The first section begins with a contextual account of the murder, media coverage and political reactions. The second section examines the *sacralisation of the victim*, first in visual and then in poetic terms. Moving from the victim to the griever, the third section discusses the *strategies of grief* that are present within the videos and the comment threads. Many of the themes identified in the first case study are present here, but with distinct inflections from the local culture. The fourth section explores the *scripting of social injustice*. Based largely on his military identity, the injustice of Rigby's death is articulated through a binary framework of oppositions, reformulating Rigby and his attackers as largely one-dimensional characters in a highly reductive narrative of good vs evil. Rigby's death is rendered in a rich vein of symbolic and rhetorical cultural forms that had a powerful resonance in the local frame, but were less successful externally.

5.2 Lee Rigby: a murder conceived with media in mind

Lee Rigby was murdered in South London on 22 May 2013. First run down by a car and then attacked with knives, Rigby's attackers were fully aware of the propaganda aspect of their actions: 'take my picture' one witness reported them as saying (Pettifor and Lines, 2013). Mimicking the talking head shot of news reports,¹ they justified the murder as revenge for the deaths of Muslims by British soldiers, claiming 'it is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'.² Adebaloja's monologue served as the delivery of a manifesto and was executed in an almost professional manner. Rigby was targeted simply because he was identified as a soldier by the 'Help for Heroes' sweatshirt he was wearing. Thus, the attack was designed for its highly symbolic value. As Sunder Katwala (2013) explained, 'the killers would seem to have an unfortunately strong intuitive grasp of our modern media culture'.

Approximately 15 minutes later armed police arrived on the scene. The two men charged at the police, brandishing knives, a cleaver and a handgun. They were both shot and wounded before their arrest. The public nature of the attack and its aftermath produced a diverse range of first-hand recordings, captured

¹The editor-in-chief of the *Guardian* newspaper, Alan Rusbridger, observed that the killers 'essentially gave a press conference' (Elliot, 2013).

²Adebaloja's monologue in full: 'The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers. And this British soldier is one; it is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. By Allah, we swear by the almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you until you leave us alone. So what if we want to live by the Sharia in Muslim lands? Why does that mean you must follow us and chase us and call us extremists and kill us? Rather you lot are extreme, you are the ones, when you drop a bomb do you think it hits one person? Or rather your bomb wipes out a whole family? This is the reality. By the way, if I saw your mother today with a buggy I would help her up the stairs, this is my nature. But we are forced by the Koran, through the [unclear] through many passages in the Koran we are told that we must fight them as they fight us, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. I apologise that women had to witness this today but in our lands women have to see the same. You people will never be safe. Remove your governments, they don't care about you. You think David Cameron is gonna get caught in the street when we start busting our guns? Do you think politicians are going to die? No, it's going to be the average guy, like you and your children. So get rid of them. Tell them to bring our troops back so you can, so we can all live in peace; leave our lands and you will live in peace. That is all I have to say. I mean, Allah is peace, I bless you, Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem, As-Salamu-Alaykum.' (ITVNews, 2013)

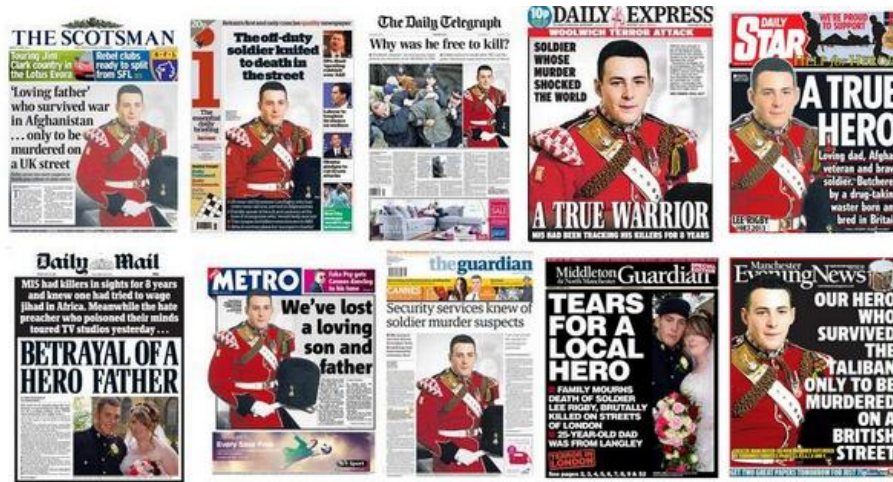


Figure 5.1: Composite of British newspapers, 23 May 2013 (via Twitter)

on mobile phones and CCTV footage, that soon flooded broadcast and social media. Although pixelated by most broadcasters, images of Rigby's body were seen around the world. However, news reports were dominated by images and recordings of the attackers and their bold, remorseless declarations.³ As Lee Rigby's murder gained international attention it soon became recognisable as a media event. Figure 5.1 shows a composite of British newspaper front pages on 23 May 2013, the morning after the attack.⁴ An accessible cache of images (many taken directly from Rigby's Facebook page by journalists) showing Rigby in full military dress resulted in a standardised representation. Media and political narratives were aesthetically similar, emotionally sympathetic to one another, and in relative alignment (McEnery et al., 2015). This is a Public Death Event writ large, the headlines conveying shock, the heroism of the victim, and emphasising the collective impact of events.

³The monologue was widely reported as a 'confession' in the British Press, and whilst it did indeed comprise an element of admission to the crime, the primary purpose must be understood as the promotion of a political agenda, not admitting to the crime just committed. As such, the notion of this act being a 'confession' is presented in inverted commas to reflect this particular interpretation. This is also reflected in the fact they handed a bystander a hand-written, two-page document justifying their actions

⁴This composite image appears to have originated from Nick Sutton, a BBC news editor, via Twitter: <https://twitter.com/suttonnick/status/337686734164852736>.

These sentiments were reflected in the statement made by the British Prime Minister David Cameron the following day:

What happened yesterday in Woolwich has sickened us all. On our televisions last night – and in our newspapers this morning – we have all seen images that are deeply shocking. The people who did this were trying to divide us... something like this will only bring us together and make us stronger... our thoughts are with the victim and with his family. They are grieving for their loved one. And we have lost a brave soldier.⁵

Cameron's statement reflects the typical political rhetoric expected in these events. He defines the emotional impact first: we are *sickened*, collectively. He then defines the shared experience of the event itself, highlighting the impact of the visual. Then we have the attempt at consolation and reconciliation, emphasising the *shared nature of the loss* and an insistence that as a collective we will grow stronger from it. He closes by personalising the sense of belonging a soldier has to society. In British culture, the soldier is an enduring sacred form; it represents an idealised masculinity and communicates the virtues of strength, courage, endurance and an elevated morality achieved through dedication to the preservation of the nation. As such, the attack on Rigby the soldier-hero is directly equated to an attack on the state itself.

Although free from local attacks since the London bombings of 2005, the spectre of fundamentalist Islamic-inspired terrorism remained prominent in political discourse. For example, the awful legacy of Britain's pre-emptive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan resulted in a recurrent media ritual as the bodies of dead soldiers were unloaded from planes and paraded through the streets of Wootton Bassett on their way to the military coroner.⁶ These visual spectacles are but one manifestation of the valorisation of the soldier-hero in British culture that

⁵Quoted in Simons (2013).

⁶Wootton Bassett is a small town in rural Wiltshire. Due to its proximity to RAF Lyneham, between 2007 and 2011 bodies of dead servicemen repatriated from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan were moved through the town on their way to the military hospital in Oxford, giving rise to regular public gatherings along the route. Jenkins et al. (2012) have produced a thoughtful study on how Wootton Bassett itself became a space for public grief and political debate over British military action.

Dawson (1994) traces back through Drake, Marlborough, and Nelson. It is a cultural symbol that has few equivalents in a society that retains a deep narrative of its ‘enlightened’ military strength, of empire, colonialism and the ‘civilising’ power of Britain. Indeed, the soldier-hero retains a powerful place in reconciling and ultimately legitimising British participation in armed conflict (Woodward et al., 2013).

The technological context is also important. London in 2013 was a place of near-ubiquitous smartphone use, giving almost everyone the ability to record and disseminate information instantaneously. In addition, the use of social media sources within broadcast news had evolved into the hybrid system we find so unremarkable now: rolling Twitter feeds, Facebook Live events, and hashtags for every news channel, host and format. This, in combination with the wide range of footage, testimony and commentary available, meant that things were different online. The most widely disseminated content on social media was not that of the victim, but rather the attackers with blood-stained hands addressing the cameras. Adebaloja’s monologue proved to be very powerful. Whilst there was some debate about the use of graphic imagery in the press, online there was no control or limitation. On Facebook, tribute pages proliferated, and one administered by Rigby’s sister Sara McLure became particularly popular.⁷ Memorial videos began appearing on YouTube within hours, with (You)Tuber Luite Lubberts posting ‘Conquering Heroes - Tribute for Lee Rigby’ (2009) at 7:12 pm, just five hours after the attack. Here, SMM occupied the space for public mourning almost immediately, with 85% of the videos uploaded in the week following events and 20% posted the evening after Rigby was murdered.

For a full timeline of events in London in May 2013, see appendix C.

⁷This became a site of extreme political conflict between supporters of the English Defence League (EDL) and other far-right organisations, and aggressive Islamist voices. Ms McLure repeatedly called for respect of the space to be adhered to, and eventually closed the interactive elements of the page, thereby reducing it to a space of passivity.

5.3 The sacralisation of Rigby

Rigby's death was rich in symbolic ways that made it possible for him to be appropriated online. This section examines how Rigby was venerated by raising his moral status to that of the soldier-hero whilst 'flattening' his personal history. This process begins with locative signalling. The video titles are generally descriptive of the social function they perform, namely tributes and memorials: 'A Tribute to a Soldier', and 'In Memory of a Hero', etc. The impact of this is threefold: First, it lays the groundwork for the more visual expressions of sacrality that come in the videos themselves. Second, it locates the content producers within an affective community from the outset: the event is personalised. Finally, it serves to define the space as one explicitly hosting a memorial and as such it sets down markers for the type of behaviour expected BTL.

5.3.1 The visual treatment of the victim

There is a striking uniformity to the visual rendering of Rigby across the corpus. The ceremonial dress of the Royal Fusiliers is laden with symbolism that draws on the full weight of history (the red military coat and the unmistakable bearskin hat originating from the Battle of Waterloo). Some images show Rigby in battle fatigues or the more muted navy ceremonial dress worn on his wedding day, and whilst 42% of all the visual data depicts Rigby, 71% of this shows him in full military dress (32% of the whole corpus). This references a particular version of British identity: the soldier-hero is a powerful ideal of manhood, who fights and, perhaps, dies for Queen, country and (the now largely conceptual) Empire. In plotting the images of Rigby in military dress, figure 5.3 highlights a hidden element of the collective aesthetics of the soldier-hero: a palette of red, white and blue echoing the Union Flag and British ceremonial occasions. The result is blunt but effective.

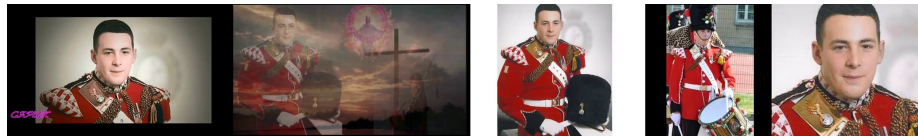


Figure 5.2: Lee Rigby as the soldier-hero

The only real variance from the soldier-hero comes in the valorisation of Rigby as a father.⁸ Rigby the father-hero is presented through wedding photos, family portraits, etc. (see figure 5.4). He is also depicted with his young son (who also appears on his own and is a constant referent in the comments discussions). The family images do not operate in isolation from the military frame. They reinforce the soldier-hero narrative by accompanying it with a vision of feminine domesticity: the wife and child vulnerable but in the safety of the male-provided home and in need of protection. Unfortunately this does not correlate with the reality of Rigby's life (as he had been separated from his wife for almost two years and was reported to be engaged to another woman), but reality presents a narrative more complex than the one required. This secondary frame grounds Rigby back in a mundane reality that is more accessible to many. I return to this idea of the father-hero shortly because, despite having little prominence in the visual corpus, it is important to the scripting of social injustice (section 5.5.1 below).

It is also significant that Rigby's death-scene appears only once in the corpus, constituting just 0.8% of the visual data. This is particularly strange because there was an abundance of footage publicly available at the time, and indeed Allan (2014) has written about the controversy of graphic scenes in the British press. So why then does it not appear in the tributes? First, there are certain norms when it comes to showing images of wounded servicemen and women,

⁸This has resonance with a more recent social movement that sets out to reconfigure the perception of male parents, such as the Fathers For Justice movement. This is a small group of activists with an eye for high-profile stunts, who dress up in superhero outfits and climb landmarks to highlight the plight of men denied access to their children. Although it might easily be argued that these actions are particularly good at creating rather pathetic images of out-of-shape middle-aged men in slightly ridiculous circumstances, the point is that the father is being revisited as a 'noble' role by activists.



Figure 5.3: Image composed of all examples of Rigby in military dress



Figure 5.4: Rigby the father-hero/family man

mainly as a sign of respect for both them and their families, but there is more going on. Perhaps it is simply that the power of the soldier-hero does not require the brutal death-scene imagery to do its work as there is no counter-narrative to fight. This is an audience that knows full well the moral reckoning of the murder, and the very fact that this happened to a soldier on home soil is more terrifying than any bloodied body could be. Before moving on, it is interesting to note that only a single frame across the entire corpus shows Rigby performing his official role in the army: a drummer. As a musician, Rigby's job was primarily ceremonial and his combat experience highly limited. However, the idea of a musician does not quite fit with the narrative of the brave and battle-scarred soldier-hero, nor does it correlate with the experiences of the soldiers of the two world wars to whom he is directly compared.

5.3.2 Activating sacred frames

One of the most striking examples of activating existing sacred frames comes from performances of 'The Last Post', a haunting tune played on a solitary bugle or trumpet and played at military and state funerals across the commonwealth (and usually followed by the Reveille). Figures 5.5a and 5.5b are screen shots from 'Lee Rigby Tribute 2013' (John O'Hara, 2013) and 'Drummer Lee Rigby R.I.P (Last Post Bugle Tribute)' (Camron Malik, 2013) respectively, which show 'The Last Post' performed by the authors of the videos. It is a particularly symbol-laden piece of music, originally marking the cessation of a day's fighting before being used at funerals.⁹ More recently, 'The Last Post' has

⁹'The Last Post' originates from a time before the mechanisation of war. It was played to mark the end of battle for that day (only for it to be resumed, of course, the following



(a) Lee Rigby Tribute 2013



(b) Drummer Lee Rigby R.I.P (Last Post Bugle Tribute)

Figure 5.5: ‘The Last Post’ is performed in tribute for Rigby

become synonymous with communal acts of remembrance, particularly those of Armistice Day.

In a similar manner, ‘Tribute video R.I.P Lee Rigby Gone But never forgotten’ (gagetman100, 2013) and ‘lisaeastbelfast tribute to lee rigby’ (John Williamson, 2013) use the British Hymn ‘I Vow to Thee, My Country’ to soundtrack their tribute, the first of which was posted within 24 hours of events. Originally a poem written by Sir Cecil Spring Rice, and titled ‘Urbs Dei (The City of God)’ in 1912. It was set to the music of Gustav Holst in 1921 and is now associated with national remembrance rituals and sung at large sporting events (times of high ritual themselves). The song describes the twin loyalties of the nation and the Kingdom of God, beginning with the words:

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;

The second verse then frames this patriotic servitude in direct correlation to serving God:

morning). The bugle call signalled to the men still out on the battlefield, who were either wounded or hiding, that the fighting was done for now, and that it was safe to follow the sound of the call to the safety of their regiment. It signals back to a more ‘honourable’ form of war, where fighting would cease and opposing sides would allow the return of the wounded, a reminder of the difference to today’s battles where civilians are far more likely to lose their lives than soldiers.

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;

This encodes an idealised Britain as one of moral righteousness, inevitability, positivity and progress; in short, everything of the modernist ideal.

This poetic treatment of Rigby – and I use the term simply to distinguish the use of words from images and music – has more variance than the visual. There is a repeated emphasis on brotherhood, soldiers (as a collective identity), and military service as an experience shared. Camron Malik presences himself and personalises events by drawing direct equivalencies with Rigby: ‘From a Bugler to a Drummer From a Father to a Father’ (2013). Heroism is continually reiterated, with Danny K R I S T asserting most emphatically, ‘Lee Rigby war god’ (2013). These are highly reductive venerative frames that fit the kind of one-dimensional hero characteristics of a children’s story. Figure (5.1) provides further examples from the comment threads:

Table 5.1: Sacred frames

Signifier	Comment	(You)Tube ID	Source video
Pride	‘Lee Rigby you made the whole country proud’	Rhiannon Louu	Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless
Hero	‘A British Hero, RIP Lee, your Death will be avenged’	TheGrowler55	Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless
Respect	‘We will remember them. from signaller to a respected fusilier R.I.P’	philgeordie1	In Memory of Drummer Lee Rigby ... Say Goodbye (Help For Heroes)
Brave	‘R.I.P Brave Soldier Lee Rigby’	HoratiocsiCaine	Tribute to Lee Rigby

Outside this, there is a particular emphasis on a narrow nationalistic rendering of Rigby. In recent times the narrative and symbolism of the military has been appropriated by a resurgent far right in the UK, who perceive the ‘Islamification’ of England to be the cause of their economic disadvantage and the UK’s diminishing influence on the world stage (Allen, 2011; 2014). Channeling anti-European and anti-migrant sentiment, mainstream and fringe political

groups responded to Rigby's murder as justification for their politics. This results in conversation BTL that is often polarised, with transgressions met with violent words. On 'Tribute to Lee Rigby' (AntRm1, 2013), a comment by the (You)Tuber JohnSmith suggests that Rigby's death is accountable to British military action in Iraq. The response is clear: 'John smith u mug I'd blow ur rip ur head of an shit down ur neck u peace of shit fuck of outa our land u dog', Louis Mccloughey (2013) writes. On another thread, DaBIONICLEFan (2013) responds to a similar incident with 'You disrespectful bastard. I will end you'. What we see BTL is an extension of the treatment of the desecration of the soldier-hero observable in parts of the national press.¹⁰ Questioning the morality of Rigby's service or what he may have done whilst on active duty brings forth a righteous indignation that only occurs when an insult is felt as a pollution of a sacred ideal (Collins, 2004, p.127). This type of behaviour is repeated throughout the comments, and reiterates the sacrality of the soldier-hero.

5.3.3 Hybrid renderings

This confluence of sacralised soldier, right-wing political nationalism and religious war come together in 'Knights Templar - A tribute to Lee Rigby' (TemplarReturn, 2013) (Figure 5.6). Rigby is reimagined as a Crusader Knight. The Knights Templar referred to in the title were a community of soldiers traceable to 1197, formed in response to the papal invocation for Holy War to 'rescue' the sacred city of Jerusalem from Muslim occupation.¹¹ By taking up the sword, the crusader was promised a place alongside God: morality was on his side. The

¹⁰Two recent examples: A woman convicted of urinating on a war memorial in Essex was roundly condemned by the press and online as having committed an act of unimaginable barbarity (Christodolou, 2016) Gordon Brown, the former Prime Minister, received relentless criticism for a perceived slight to the family of a fallen soldier when his handwriting was felt to be too informal and messy for the context of a letter of condolence (Laing, 2009).

¹¹In 1095 Pope Urban II issued the decree: 'By the authority of God and by that of St Peter the Chief of the Apostles, conceded to us by God, we grant such remission and absolution of sins, that thee shall accomplish it, or shall die during it, shall obtain absolution for all his sins which with a contrite and humble heart he shall confess, and shall receive the fruit of eternal retribution from the Reneumerator of all' (Henderson, 1910, p.335).

title casts Rigby's murder as a direct equivalent to the medieval wars fought between Christianity and Islam.

This video declares 'We wish to pay tribute to Soldier Lee Rigby Killed by Jihadists on the streets of our very own capital'. Monastic chanting plays: 'lee wasn't just murdered by anybody. He was *Killed in Action*' (emphasis added). 'Killed in Action' is a military term that describes the status of the soldier, not a description of events. We see graves faded into images of Christ, who is depicted first in heavenly repose amongst the clouds, and is then prostrate on the cross in the ultimate act of sacrifice. Drawing a direct correlation between Rigby and Christ is not subtle. We then see a Knight Templar in full battle dress – chainmail and white mantel – bowed in submission to God with his sword before him. The video ends with shots of Rigby, the Templar Cross and a candle as the chanting fades and the screen returns to black.

This crusader imagery bridges historical and contemporary codes. The Knights' white mantel bears the red Templar cross, the red symbolising blood and a commitment to martyrdom and mirroring the English flag. The cross itself represents the sacrifice of Christ, the very means through which Christ achieved absolution. The Knights Templar were famously forbidden to leave the field once battle had begun, bearing the cross on their chests as they sought either death or victory. 'Take your place at the side of your Bothers', the video implores, 'And at the side of Jesus Christ'. Rigby is cast firmly in a battle of good vs evil: an existential fight for survival.

The authors of this video are appropriating Rigby to promote their extremist views, his death validating the perception of persecution and legitimising a position of aggressive-defence. This narrative sacralises national identity and activates it as a political resource. The crusader parallel is built on casting Muslim influence as a profanation of British ideals that demands retributive action.¹² The impure Muslim, polluting the pure soil of England with the blood

¹²Pope Urban II's decree authorising the first knights as papal crusaders established the fall

of its martyred hero, demands a restorative act for harmony to be returned. Startlingly, this is a direct mirror of the fundamentalist Islamist ideology they conceive themselves as being locked in battle with.¹³

The soldier-hero exists as a temporal ‘other’: it is *Our History*, but it is actively used to define *Our Present* by actors across the political spectrum. The military are *Our Boys* and the fallen may have physically passed on but their legacy is *Our Way of Life*, attributable to the sacrifices these men have made for us. Thus, the morality of the soldier-hero is eternal and unwavering, and can be invoked at any time as part of what Billig (1995) identifies as ‘banal nationalism’. Casting Rigby as the soldier-hero makes his sacrifice a collective one. In many ways, the liminal state of the dead soldier is maintained as an active political resource, to be drawn from whenever politically required: ‘Knights Templar - A tribute to Lee Rigby’ simply draws from a deeper historical resource than most.

This is but one illustrative example. Across the corpus the transformation of Rigby from victim of violence into the soldier-hero is explicit and swift. It is also largely one-dimensional, with the fatherhood frame being a difference of degree, not kind. As a soldier, Rigby was ripe with symbolic associations making it possible for his narrative to be appropriated in frames of nationalism, patriarchy, and far-right politics.

This section has highlighted the following features of the sacralisation of Rigby:

- The narrative alignment between SMM and the wider media discourse accelerates the primary rendering of the victim. There is no immediate conflict over control of the narrative, which appears to reduce the creative counter-force.

of Jerusalem as an act of profanation against God, and the liberation of the city the restorative act necessary to return sacred order. Accordingly, the Knights Templar achieved a sanctified status in their day and engaged in a zero-sum battle with Islam in the name of God.

¹³As a worrying afterthought, the crusades were used to legitimise violence against a number of other groups: the Slavs in Eastern Europe, fellow Christians aligned with the Byzantine Empire, and the Cathars of western Europe, to name but a few.

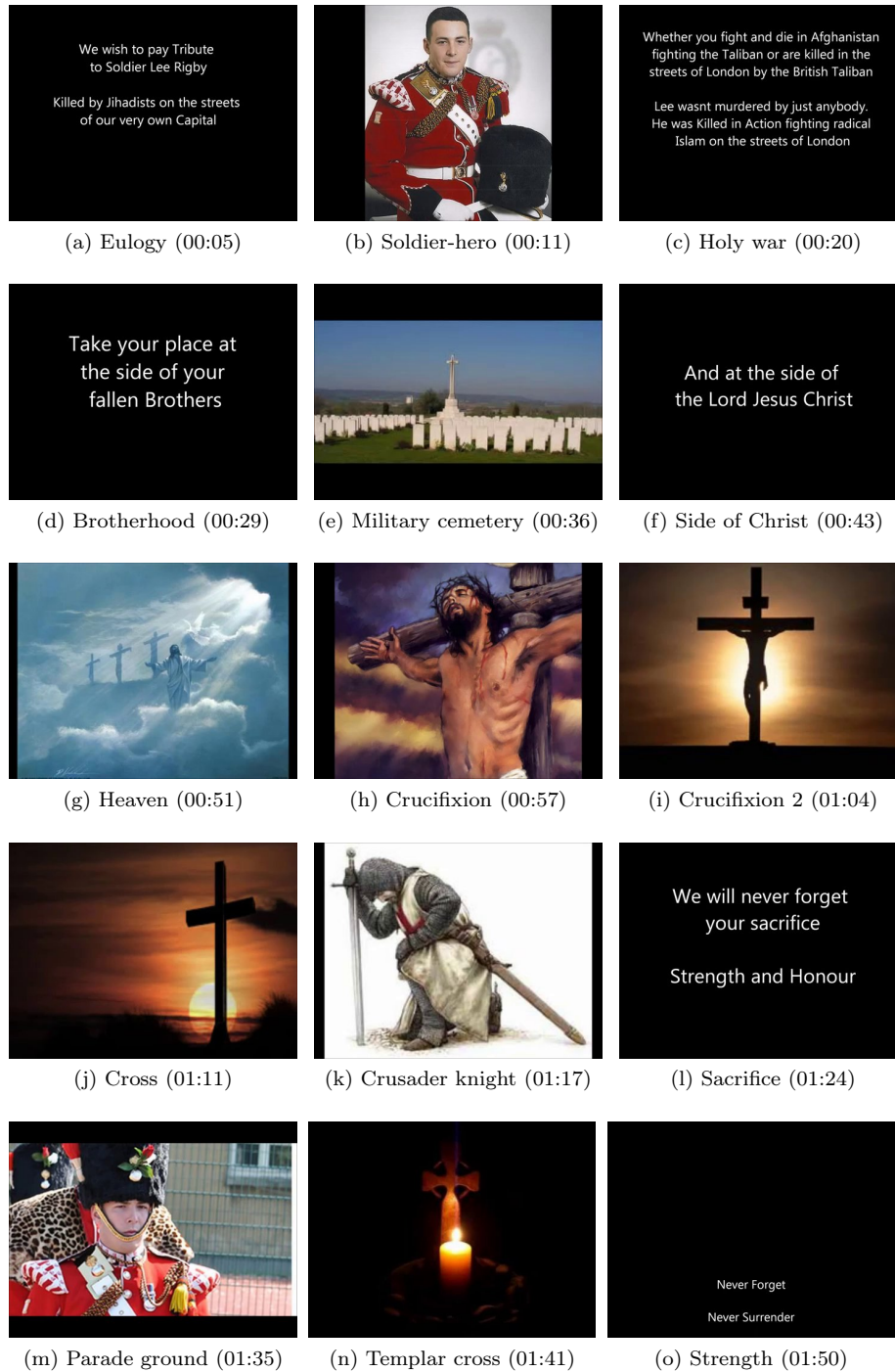


Figure 5.6: ‘Knights Templar - A tribute to Lee Rigby’: storyboard

- The soldier-hero is a powerful grievable form that serves to simplify Rigby's personal narrative. This is important because Rigby's death is fundamentally different to those of soldiers killed in foreign lands: for the UK population, this was a hyper-personalised event.
- The heavily militaristic tone has implications for accessibility. Groups sympathetic to nationalist thinking will be drawn to it, whilst others will be alienated by it. In the remit of this study this cannot be proved either way, but these are fair conclusions to draw.
- SMM greatly impacts the speed of memorialisation and opens up access to the process. A soldier killed in exceptional circumstances will in all likelihood receive some form of official memorial, but this is likely to take place at a much later date. SMM operates in the space immediately after an event.

5.4 Strategies of grief

The focus now moves outward from the victim and towards the (You)Tubers so affected by Rigby's death that they were moved to react. To define an object as a memorial or tribute carries implications for those who commune around it. Thus this section examines the strategies for performing grief both within the videos and BTL. In doing so, we see how grief becomes a mechanism through which individuals locate themselves within the event, in relation to the victim, and within the collective body.

5.4.1 Appropriated and embodied grief

Online, emotions can be remediated just as easily as visual content. This is a primary strategy for grieving and an essential component of the platform

vernacular. In ‘A tribute to Lee Rigby’ by AntRm1 (2013), the grief of Rigby’s family is appropriated and deployed just as simply another resource. We hear the voice of Rigby’s father quavering with emotion as he reads a poem at his son’s funeral:

You fought bravely and with honour died,
You leave your family so full of pride,
Sleep well you soldier, your job is done,
Your war is over, and your battle won,
Our family chain is broken, and nothing is the same,
But as God takes us one by one,
Our chain will link again.

Watching this is an emotional experience. There is an unnerving physicality to the high quality recording, so precise that we hear every intake of breath. The acoustics of the church amplify the movement of bodies on hard pews, noses being blown, and coughs that cloak tears. The embodied grief of Rigby’s closest family becomes a surrogate for ‘our’ grief, as witnesses to both the funeral and the murderous act. In a separate video, a transcription of the same poem is displayed on screen with the explanation that it was written by Rigby’s sister in the days after the attack. It makes the experience of grief intimate despite constituting an appropriation of a vulnerable and private moment. The author’s decision to use this resource could be taken as selfish, and as viewers there is something troublingly voyeuristic in the viewing, yet it remains a powerful device. Offline, this type of appropriation of intensely personal words would be at best insensitive and at worst an intrusion across a sacralised boundary. The rules are different online.

Others draw from different resources. In ‘A Street in Woolwich’, Sue Rivers (2013) stands alone in front of a white wall looking ill at ease. She nervously sings an adapted version of the 1969 folk hit ‘Streets of London’ by Ralph McTell. A song about maintaining pride in the face of adversity, it sits in stark

opposition to the hubristic military narrative espoused in the majority of the videos. It is a strange, discomfoting performance. The stark lighting and raw audio leave nowhere to hide; there has been no post-production to soften any edges. Yet it is intimate and personal in a way that stays with the viewer. This is clearly someone who does not normally do this type of thing – the YouTube account has posted no other videos and the activity log is minimal – so we can assume with some confidence that it was an exceptional act. This is an ordinary person so moved as to produce what is clearly an *extraordinary* video. It is a very personal exposure.

Table 5.2: Lyrics altered and original, ‘A Street in Woolwich’

A Street in Woolwich	Streets of London
Did you see the young man	Have you seen the old man
Outside the Woolwich barracks	In the closed-down market
Hope in his heart as he strode without a care	Kicking up the papers with his worn out shoes
In his eyes there was no fear,	In his eyes you see no pride,
There could be no danger here,	Hands held loosely at his side,
The message ‘Help for Heroes’ on the T shirt he wore	Yesterday’s paper, telling yesterday’s news
So how can you tell me it’s Glory	So how can you tell me you’re lonely
And that all is fair in love and war	And say for you that the sun don’t shine
Let me tell you what I saw	Let me take you by the hand
Right here in the Streets of London	And lead you through the streets of London
One more fallen hero,	I’ll show you something
Who should make you change your mind	To make you change your mind
Did you see the young girl	Have you seen the old girl
Confronting his attackers	Who walks the streets of London
And her mother with her who held him in her arms	Dirt in her hair and her clothes in rags
They made time for talking,	She’s no time for talking,
They didn’t keep right on walking	She just keeps right on walking
Their lives on the line, for a stranger in the street	Carrying her home, in two carrier bags

This is a musical performance that uses the strategy of turning the camera upon oneself in order that the human body can physically perform grief. This is very different to the use of found music as a soundtrack, which is covered in detail below (section 5.4.4) as a means of framing grief. Here I am concerned with



(a) Sue Rivers performs ‘Streets of Woolwich’



(b) Yung’Gee performs ‘See You Again’

Figure 5.7: Contrasting performance styles for Rigby

how grief is embodied. In stark contrast to Sue Rivers’ quiet, contemplative and ultimately uplifting tone, there is a significant occurrence of (You)Tubers using anger for realising grief. They draw heavily from American rap and hip-hop culture and its association with disaffected youth. In ‘Tribute to Solider. (R.I.P Lee Rigby Drummer Boy) London Attack Rap’, Luke Barnard (2013) addresses his audience directly: ‘Before I start I just wanna say don’t just, y’know, bob your head to the beat, you’ve gotta listen to what I’m saying and if you can’t hear then just rewind it back, right?’ He is so determined and anxious to be heard that he demands we engage fully, exposing fragility in juxtaposition to the aggressive style and violent lyrics that follow. Equating terrorism with immigration, he sings ‘Scavengers claiming benefits, they’re like vultures at the roadsides disrespecting widows of fallen soldiers’. This is an emotional, anger-laden production posted just six days after Rigby was murdered.

Another video posted by Reece BCA (2013) two months after events is similar, reiterating Rigby’s service to the crown and the son he left behind. He asks, ‘What’s he going to do when he’s old enough to know? Yeah, he’ll know that his dad died a hero’, before addressing the child directly: ‘I may not know you personally, I’m just a young lad from overseas, yeah, I’m just a lyrical mercenary, but it still pains me with what these young eyes see’. Anger here conveys a judgement: it tells us ‘this should not have happened’. It is orientated to the present moment in a way that actively maintains those emotions. This

style is not inclusive; it does not invite participation. Despite the sympathy expressed towards Rigby's son, the anger and aggression is alienating for what might otherwise be sympathetic audiences. Instead, this serves as a hard barrier to entry, and is reflected in the viewing figures (767 and 901 respectively, from an average of 4,432 views across the corpus).

There is an exception that overcomes this is with a clever strategy. 'Yung'Gee - See You Again ft. joegarratt (Wiz Khalifa Cover)', posted by Kenyon Management (2015) is a hybrid of original rap music with samples from a famous pop song, and so bridges personal content with an easily accessible mode. Its success is reflected in over 58,000 views, despite being uploaded a full two years after Rigby was murdered (in May 2015).¹⁴ The lyrics move between a general collective reflection repurposed from the original ('We've come a long way from where we've begun'), and a direct address to Rigby's son that serves to presence the singer ('Listen to what I say little man and believe that if you've got a dream little man then achieve that'). It is not possible to know how many views are attributable to those seeking out the original version of the song, but this is itself a technique of search optimisation that is put to strategic use here.

5.4.2 Virtual shrines

The representation of virtual shrines is present throughout the videos, with candles, flowers and Rigby's image treated in the manner of a religious icon (see figure 5.8). We also observe the cross-pollination of shrines, with shrine imagery taken directly from other tribute videos dedicated to Rigby. The example in figure 5.8d appears in at least two other later videos ('Tribute to Drummer Lee Rigby Music by The Soliders' (2013) and 'Sentinel - Father Give Me Strength (A Tribute to Lee Rigby)' (2013)). These otherwise mundane symbols of grief

¹⁴It is a re-working of a song by Wiz Khalifa that was released in early 2015, retaining the ballad-like chorus and replacing the rap verse with lyrics referencing Rigby's murder.



(a) Tribute to Lee Rigby



(b) lisaeastbelfast tribute to lee rigby



(c) Tribute to Drummer Lee Rigby Music by The Soldiers



(d) Tribute video R.I.P Lee Rigby Gone But never forgotten

Figure 5.8: Virtual shrines for Rigby

make mourning accessible to the widest possible audience, embedding events within global heuristics of grief, bereavement and loss.

These grief mnemonics encode the space, creating expectations of behaviour that we would expect in offline equivalents. This is reflected in the comment threads: there is very little standard conversational activity (i.e. comment-and-reply). Instead we see repetitive, stylised statements indirectly addressed to the wider audience. The largely declarative ‘R.I.P.’ and all its derivatives (rip, RIP, rest in peace) are emblematic of this, appearing in 23% of all comments and often constituting a posting in its entirety. This is the essence of ritualised behaviour: iterative, stylised, repeatable actions. It is similar in function and form to reciting a prayer or lighting a candle offline, the performance of which marks the individual as emotionally invested in the event and thereby signalling membership to the community of grief.

The bestowing of a blessing operates in much the same way. David1966dc, the

author of ‘Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless’ which amassed over 17,000 views, uses ‘God Bless Lee Rigby’ as a sign-off to every comment he makes. He is a highly engaged user, posting 40% of the total comments under his video. Strikingly, this seems to elicit a mirrored behaviour in others, with 45% of replies to his comments adding a similar sign-off. David1966dc assumes the role of ‘ritual specialist’ (Bell, 1992, p.145), the creator of the video curating the direction and tone of the conversations BTL. In ritual we cannot expect (or desire) a *completely* common emotional experience, but this type of strategic work signposts how one *ought* to feel and how that might be communicated to others. This is a resource for presencing oneself within the group free from qualitative differences of experience. Making a public blessing is much more than simply communicating an emotional response; it also conveys a judgement. This is not ‘I feel bad’, but rather ‘this is bad because...’. In other words, these blessings can articulate moral readings in a simple, stylised form.

5.4.3 The imperative to remember

Whilst virtual shrines are rendered through near-universal signifiers, one local symbol has prominence: the red poppy. Originating from the Battle of the Somme in the First World War (these were the first flowers to grow on the devastated battle fields), the poppy has grown into one of the singularly most recognisable symbols of military service and sacrifice, with the national Remembrance Day being known informally as ‘Poppy Day’. As a symbol it is a great leveller: from pauper to prince, everyone wears the same simple paper design. And the poppy carries a specific instruction: it tells us we cannot afford to forget, that there exists a moral *imperative to remember*.

This imperative to remember is present throughout the comment threads in utterances such as ‘GBNF’ (‘Gone But Not Forgotten’), as illustrated in table



Figure 5.9: The use of red poppies

table 5.3. Note also the capitalisation, using the limited affordances to turn the text into a command, not a request. It tells us that remembering is a unifying duty we must perform, whereby the cost of forgetting is a return to the evil which took the lives of so many soldier-heros in war.¹⁵ This is a powerful and emotive narrative because the horrors of the world wars remain so close to Western life in both time and space, and are enacted in a multitude in social rituals.¹⁶ Events like Lee Rigby, the London bombings, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, even 9/11 are all connected back to this imperative to remember through the mass media and political machinery. Today it links into an existential threat to our way of life from the evil of terrorism rather than from a return of traditional warfare. This is a much more proximate evil in many ways. Table 5.3 illustrate how this manifests in the comment threads.

¹⁵Behind all of this lies the unspoken horror of the Holocaust, largely understood as the base measure of pure evil (Lynch, 2012b, p.43).

¹⁶Think, for example, of the the war memorials that sit in most European towns, the political institutions of the EU, Nato, etc. Beyond the Western context, daily life for millions of people in the Middle East is defined by the events of the Second World War.

Table 5.3: The ‘imperative to remember’ expressed BTL

Name	Video	Date	Comment
Antony-Buckley	Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless	24.05.2013 22:04:00	‘We will NEVER forget you.’
david1966dc	Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless	24.05.2013 22:11:00	‘Lest We Forget!’
JohnKennedy	Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless	07.11.2014 22:46:00	‘Gbnf rip my friend’
stuart.thadon	Yung’Gee - See You Again ft. joegarratt (Wiz Khalifa Cover)	12.05.2015 23:42:07	‘Brillant LEST WE FORGET ’
kenny	In Memory of Drummer Lee Rigby ... Say Goodbye (Help For Heroes)	07.07.2013 09:07:48	‘theres only one lee rigby only one lee rigbyy Rip soldier stand down gbnf’

5.4.4 Soundtracking grief

Music is used for a number of different effects. I previously discussed the musical element of several videos in terms of activating sacred frames (section 5.3.2) and as embodied grief (section 5.4.1). The use of found music to *soundtrack* a tribute is a separate modal affordance. The ability for a (You)Tuber to combine imagery with music is a fundamental aspect of the platform’s popularity, and musical resources are drawn from pop music, classical and film scores once more. ‘Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless’ (David1966dc, 2013) uses Bob Dylan’s words from his 1974 track ‘Forever Young’ to plead for the subject not to accept the condition of death: ‘May you stay Forever Young’. The video is full of this kind of imperative: text overlaid on the screen reads, ‘Please pay your respects to those maimed or fallen in battles past or present’. Hannah Taala (2013) uses the international hit pop song ‘Read All About It’ by Professor Green and Emélie Sande, a ballad of pure exaggerated emotion. They sing:

I wanna sing,
I wanna shout
I wanna scream ‘til the words dry out
So put it in all of the papers,
I’m not afraid

Rigby's heroism is also built in forms that are less explicitly militaristic or nationalistic: matthew hewitt (2013) uses Mariah Carey's saccharine-sweet pop ballad 'Hero' in his montage tribute; Liute Luberts (2013) soundtracks her video with the snare-drum marching band declaring 'sing when you see the conquering heroes come marching to the rhythm of a different drum'; Mgray88100 (2013) takes a much more conceptual approach with the dreamlike disco composition of 'A Real Hero' by Electric Youth.

In using commercial content like this, (You)Tubers draw from the resources of people whose very profession is to communicate emotion in exaggerated, hyperbolic ways for commercial gain. It is therefore rich material if chosen well. Whilst on one level it may diminish the personal aspect of the memorial, it also makes the video accessible to a wide audience. Looking back to the previous discussion of rap music, we saw how this mode of address puts barriers up between performers and the audience. Here, the use of commercial content makes the experience of watching more accessible and shared. The inclusion of pop music normalises the viewing of what might otherwise be considered morbid or depressing content.¹⁷ Commercial music also drives popularity, increasing the viewer figures particularly when it is referenced in the video title. Pop music provides a familiar, unchallenging and accessible vocabulary of grief.

This account of the *strategies of grief* highlights some of the key themes observed in the case study, particularly:

- The grief of others can be remediated to serve one's own emotional needs.

The appropriation of Rigby's father's eulogy by several (You)Tubers reflects either an ignorance, disregard, or – most likely – an evolution of social norms concerning personal content.

¹⁷There are many more examples of pop music used to this affect; 'Fix You' by Coldplay, and Tracy Chapman's 'The Promise', amongst others. The 70s rock anthem 'We're Not Gonna Take It' by Twisted Sister is used to affect defiance in the face of fear, and the Soldiers' cover version of the song 'He Ain't Heavy (He's My Brother)' conveys solidarity, commitment and strength in loss.

- There is a vernacular of grief in the comment threads that would be bizarre on the threads of ‘regular’ videos and certainly inappropriate if replicated face-to-face. A significant majority of BTL activity is non-conversational, making no direct reference to either the video or other (You)Tubers.
- Grief mnemonics are again seen to play an important role in ‘setting the scene’ for memorialising.
- Music provides an accessible and simple means of conveying emotions, with popular music having a significant impact on a video’s popularity.

5.5 Scripting social injustice

Returning to Dayan and Katz’s (1992) terminology, we now turn to examine how the death of Rigby – i.e. the death *event*, not the *man* – is scripted as a social injustice, and how this informs and is informed by the ritual process. The cause of injustice is unambiguous: Rigby was murdered by extremists. However, to have wider social purchase, this simple case-effect relationship needs activating in a compelling narrative arc. We will see how this is constituted through three elements: the victim, perpetrators and audience. Any good narrative needs both sympathetic protagonist and explicit antagonist. This is activated through the hyper-personalisation of Rigby and the depersonalisation of the perpetrators, resulting in a clear binary opposition. Finally, a script requires an audience, and I argue that the participants of SMM should be thought of as members of a *communion of grief* that constitutes this vital third element to scripting injustice.

5.5.1 Injustice symbols

As a soldier, Rigby is invested with a raised social status. However, in terms of becoming symbolic of a social injustice this is a somewhat problematic notion

for three reasons: First, the soldier is no longer unambiguously on the right side of the ethical divide. Recent history – the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – has ensured this. Second, the kind of far-right appropriation of Rigby (and wider nationalist symbols) discussed above is closed, divisive and creates barriers to entry for those not in political alignment. Third, the soldier exists in an elevated position of strength that does not correlate with the status of victimhood. These issues need reconciling for an injustice narrative to be convincing.

Terrorism has long been cast as an existential threat to the West. After the 9/11 attacks in New York, George Bush explained, ‘our way of life, our very freedom, came under attack’, and in 2005, following the London bombings, Tony Blair declared, ‘now is the time to show our defence in common values’. This type of rhetoric has shades of a *moral panic* about it (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1972; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). A moral panic occurs when ‘a condition, episode or group of persons emerge to become defined as a threat to societal values’ (Cohen, 1972, p.9). These are moments in which emotions, morality, and social values are all central and amplified and in which symbolism proliferates. The video ‘one of us in memory of lee rigby no need for war’ (gagetman100, 2013) is an illustrative example, switching between stereotyped, value-laden opposites: soldiers vs Muslim preachers, the Qur’an vs the Bible, war graves vs a nuclear cloud. It thrashes home the existential threat felt by the authors, and in turn opens the possibility for imagining what type of reaction is required as restorative justice. Rigby becomes ‘upscaled’ to reference questions of an altogether different, more profound nature.

The soldier-hero construct separates Rigby as distinct from the mundane and quotidian. He is *not* one of us: the soldier-hero is *extraordinary*, morally elevated, powerful, brave, true, strong, etc. Furthermore, death is a tragic but necessary and expected cost of war, i.e. the death of a soldier in warfare is legitimate, justified even. So, how can a soldier fallen in battle become symbolic of a social injustice? There is an internal contradiction of sorts. The assertion

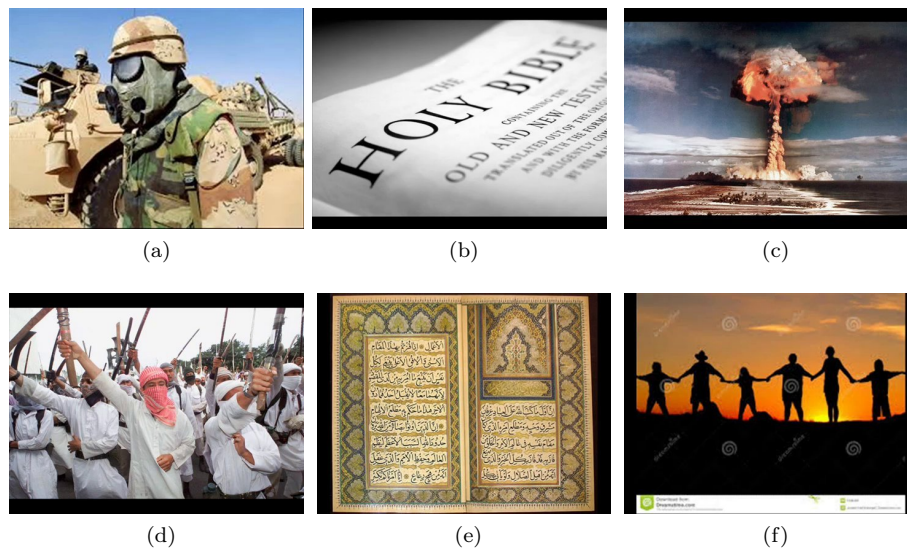


Figure 5.10: Oppositions in ‘one of us in memory of lee rigby no need for war’

of Rigby as a father reconciles this to a large degree: he is a family man, a protector and a provider leaving a vulnerable woman and child behind. The father-hero is a necessary secondary frame that unambiguously communicates this sense of injustice. In raising Rigby’s identity as a father *over* that of his military service, it becomes a much more accessible story. By proxy, this becomes a crime against a child who is left fatherless, activating another powerful sacred frame: the innocence of the child.¹⁸ The reality was not of a devoted husband and father: he was separated from his wife and saw his son intermittently due to the requirements of his job. This takes place across the comments (figure 5.4) as well as in the videos (I have not included visual examples here as they depict Rigby’s young son). The power of a symbol is its ability to be read by as wide an audience as possible. Although at times contradictory, the twin renderings of hero-soldier and father provide enough symbolic resonance for two quite different branches of the injustice script.

¹⁸As Lynch explores at length (2012a, 2012b), the recent child abuse scandals that have rocked the Catholic Church and many parts of the British establishment have resulted in the child being a very powerful sacred form.

Table 5.4: Comments emphasising fatherhood

Name	Video	Date	Comment
ianwatts	In Memory of Drummer Lee Rigby ... Say Goodbye (Help For Heroes)	10.06.2013 02:59:05	‘this is a good tribute to a fallen / son / brother / husband / father / and innocent soldier / R.I.P LEE’
RonnieClarks- on	Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless	09.01.2015 22:24:00	‘Yes God Bless Mr Lee Rigby. God Bless his Son and may he grow up to be proud of his Father.’

5.5.2 Victim and perpetrators

The sacred-hero needs its profane opposite: the evil perpetrators. Defining the perpetrator is essential for the attribution of responsibility. Just as Rigby is venerated as symbolic of all that is good, so those responsible for his death are denounced as evil. As self-professed jihadists pursuing a bloodthirsty campaign of violence, this was a relatively easy process. It is achieved through a mixture of depersonalisation and demonisation.



(a) ‘Tribute video R.I.P Lee Rigby Gone But never forgotten’ (gagetman100, 2013)



(b) ‘one of us in memory of lee rigby no need for war’ (Danny K R I S T, 2013)

Figure 5.11: Images of attackers appear only twice in the entire corpus

First, the perpetrators are physically removed from the tributes. In striking contrast to wider media coverage, the attackers appear only in two videos for less than three seconds of total screen time.¹⁹ Similarly, they are barely men-

¹⁹Again in complete opposition to Neda where the ‘evil’ regime was depicted again and

tioned by name in the comment threads,²⁰ thus being denied their individual identities, closing the opportunity for personal connections to arise. This process in oppositional contrast to the hyper-personalisation of Rigby. Accordingly, the perpetrators are also ‘upscaled’ here, to the level of a corrupted ideology (i.e. Islam, terrorism, fundamentalism, etc.), and everything becomes framed within this discourse.

Rather than referring to the perpetrators by name, (You)Tubers use comparisons and equivalencies, particularly in reference to the terrorist campaigns of the IRA, as illustrated in table 5.5:

Table 5.5: Making historical equivalencies

Name	Video	Date	Comment
JamesMcGuinness	Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless	02.06.2013 14:20:00	‘Another young British soldier has lost his life to those who want to destroy our nation wether it be muslim extremists or irish republican scum our goverment must stand strong and meet fire with fire to keep our protestant nation free and united’
JohnKennedy	Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless	07.11.2014 22:48:00	‘Fuck it be it ira or muslim extremists we will wipe them out.’

In defining something as evil, as profane, in opposition to our sacred soldier-hero and all that he stands for, we are reducing the perpetrators’ humanity: they become sub-human, animals, savages, insane, etc., and our hatred, anger and invocation of violence is justified. That is, an injustice legitimises extraordinary

again, either literally or by implication through the violence of police, military or paid militiamen.

²⁰In fact, the only time they are mentioned in name is actually in defence of their actions. John Smith (2013) quotes them directly when defending their actions due to the military involvement in Muslim deaths: ‘The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers [...] Tell them to bring our troops back. leave our lands and you will live in peace.’ - Michael Adebolajo Lee Rigby deserved to die because he was part of the British military. The military is a murder machine, killing for the profit of oil companies and defence corporations. He invaded SOMEONE ELSE’S COUNTRY for money. Lee Rigby is burning in hell for waging war on Afghanistan’.

actions, or retributive justice, as illustrated in table 5.6. Those defined as responsible for a profanation can be killed, incarcerated, or have their legal rights removed in a way that would be unacceptable under normal social conditions. Those that carry out such retributive justice might even be considered as heroes themselves.

Table 5.6: Retributive justice

Name	Video	Date	Comment
ianharvey2000	Woolwich attack- Lee Rigby a small tribute to a Solider & Drummer murdered 22 May 2013	26.05.2013 17:50:12	‘murdered by muslim savages.’
superman1982	Lee Rigby Hero	18.10.2013 14:14:08	‘The scum that did this should rot in hell.’
invinoveritas	Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless	28.05.2013 00:33:00	‘Let our country unite, regardless of creed or colour, all right-minded people should condemn the evil act and not let the scum who did this win.’
LouisMccloughy	Tribute to Lee Rigby	27.12.2014 20:05:39	‘Rip you hero are government need to hang these scum John smith u mug I’d blow ur rip ur head of an shit down ur neck u peace of shit fuck of outa our land u dog god bless u mate ull live on in your son, brave soldier.’
Essa	lisaeastbelfast tribute to lee rigby	14.11.2015 20:37:54	‘Drummer Lee Rigby taken from us by filthy murdering scum R.’

It is worth comparing this heightened rhetoric with what was eventually learnt about Adebolajo and Adebowale. Both are black British men from deprived areas of London. Both converted to Islam in their early adulthood: Adebolajo whilst attending Greenwich University and Adebowale whilst serving a short prison sentence. After prison Adebowale was diagnosed with a mental illness. In 2009 Adebolajo was recorded whilst speaking at an event in opposition to the English Defence League, saying ‘Don’t be scared of them... You are here only to please Allah. You’re not here for any other reason, if you are here just

for a fight, please leave our ranks' (ITV.com, 2013). Just as Rigby the divorced drummer was not quite the warrior-cum-patriarch some would have us believe, the simplistic narrative of Adebolajo and Adebowale as *external* enemies does not hold up to scrutiny, and ultimate responsibility for these men and what they did becomes a much more uncomfortable question. Questions of social and economic marginalisation, neglect by the health services, and the proximity to a culture of violence in deprived London estates suggest, as McGarry (2014) observes, that this was far from 'terrorism, pure and simple' as David Cameron had claimed. Both known to the British authorities and that their radicalisation had happened in the UK, relatively recently, and quite probably whilst under the care of the British government, which raises legitimate questions about the ultimate 'responsibility' for Rigby's death. None of this is meant to detract from the immorality of events nor negate the responsibility of Adebolajo and Adebowale. The purpose is simply to show just how reductive the dominant frames of perpetrator and victim are, and how they work as functions of political power. What is more, we see how important these scripts are for social cohesion, and how everybody plays a part in enforcing them. This reductive script is healing. It allows us to look no further, to ignore or dismiss much more complicated and problematic questions.

This narrative tells us that British society is *strong, pure, rational* and *legitimate*, just as the terrorists are *weak, polluted, emotional*, and *primitive* (see table 5.7). Most striking is that these moral categories are not particularly different from those expressed by Adebolajo and Adebowale themselves (either explicitly or as reflected in the wider fundamentalist discourse). What is important is the relative weighting one has over the other. This comes primarily from the community that forms around them, which becomes self-legitimising.

Table 5.7: Sacred-profane classifiers

VICTIM FRAMEWORK		PERPETRATOR FRAMEWORK	
SACRED NATION	PROFANE IDEOLOGY	SACRED FAITH	PROFANE SOCIETY
Pure	Polluted	Pure	Polluted
Righteous	Immoral	Righteous	Immoral
Strong	Unstable	Eternal	Transient
Predictable	Erratic	Morally enlightened	Morally regressive
Enlightened	Primitive	Humble	Arrogant
Legitimate	Illegitimate	Caring	Selfish
Rational	Emotional	Emotional wealth	Monetary wealth
Intelligent	Ignorant	Enlightened	Primitive
Controlled	Violent	God	Man
Respected	Feared	Heaven	Earth
Civilised	Barbaric		
Benefactor	Parasitic		
Progressive	Regressive		

5.5.3 A communion of grief

We have seen throughout that participants drive the focus, tone and direction of SMM, playing an essential role in the scripting of social injustice. First and foremost, the participants of SMM act as witnesses. (You)Tubers at every level – video producers, watchers, or commentators – converge around digital testimony of the event, be it first hand documentary evidence or abstracted content grounded in the original testimony. These are witnesses *of*, *in*, and *via* media (Peters, 2001, p.708), embedded in the event in multiple ways. And as witnesses, participants in SMM play twin roles: as *passive witness*, in observation of the original event, and as *active witness*, in producing knowledge of the event for the benefit of others (ibid, p.709). SMM produces an ongoing account of the event, actively scripting social injustice through collective engagements.

For Turner (1969) the liminal is characterised by an ‘overflowing of *communitas*’ (Dayan and Katz, 1992, p.104). It is a shift from the *indicative* (what really is) to the *subjunctive* (what could or should be). In SMM, otherwise unconnected individuals gather online to perform this process. These interpersonal bonds are too fragile to constitute a *community*, a value-laden term that suggests deeper connections than observed here. However, it is not too much to conclude that

the participants of SMM constitute a *communion of grief*, meaning most simply an intimate fellowship of grief. The way the communion of grief articulates itself is central to the wider scripting of social injustice.

This section has illustrated how the underlying *perception* of social injustice that is integral to the public death event is scripted predominantly through three forms:

- Rigby is formulated as a symbol of social injustice. This rendering is partly contradictory to the sacralisation he also undergoes, due to questions of power and agency, but these twin narratives are able to exist in tandem.
- The perpetrators responsible for the injustice are presented in reductive terms that close further debate and provide comfort in their simplicity.
- This scripting is both formulated and legitimised by the audience, binding them in a communion of grief.

5.6 Conclusion

The death of a soldier represents a privileged form of loss, defined *a priori* as an injury to the collective. The murder of a soldier on home soil, in broad daylight, captured on camera and carried out by attackers determined to get as much media attention as possible created a media event online and offline, with the two reinforcing one another. This chapter has shown how SMM appropriated the mourning process and reformulated Rigby as the quintessential soldier-hero: a powerful and enduring sacred form. The details of his non-combat role as a drummer, his fractured home life and the vulnerabilities exposed by the manner of his death were removed from the script so that Rigby could represent all that is good, strong and honourable about British society and identity. In the digital

space, Rigby became captured in the liminal, forever present and lauded in an idealised version of his lived identity, yet never quite being released.

The full range of modal resources available to (You)Tubers was employed in Rigby's sacralisation: pop music, shrines, hymns, religious iconography and history is drawn upon. Socialised emotional responses were reproduced across media: collective grief is formulated as pain against our shared national identity, as a danger to the abstract 'freedoms' secured by past sacrifice, and through an *imperative to remember* that is framed as key to our collective victory. These are all resources appropriated from established social rituals of remembrance, and are used for presencing the participants of SMM. These frames come together to script the social injustice of Rigby's murder in a narrative of an existential battle between good and evil. Rigby is – somewhat paradoxically – cast as vulnerable and his attackers as responsible for all that is wrong and corrupt in society. This reductive narrative brings comfort and reconciliation through the inference that justice will be served through their removal and incarceration.

Chapter 6

Comparative analysis: SMM and YouTube

6.1 Introduction

Media tell us stories about ourselves. New media follow that tradition, but their networked nature alters the equation. The stories produced through social media are co-constructed and interactive, and the processes by which they are told are open, amplified and accelerated. The events discussed in the last two chapters represent public deaths, but in contrasting circumstances in very different locales. However, both resulted in very similar articulations on YouTube. This chapter explores the points of conjunction and divergence between the two. It requires asking what patterns are a result of the architectural affordances of the platform, what is informed by the socio-political context of the death, and what is attributable to the cultural conditions common to experiences of traumatic, mediated deaths. As I re-tread the structure of the case studies here (and as has been the case throughout) I do not wish to impose a causal linearity by

the structure of the analysis. It is a ‘value added’ model (Smelser, 1962), which begins by contextualising the events, then moves outward to take account of the participants and the space in question.

In section two (6.2) I compare the conditions of death. The analysis examines the role of technologies of capture and sharing in framing the deaths as public death events, both online and in the wider media. Section three (6.3) considers the sacralisation of the victims, showing that the appropriation of the victim narrative by the online community represents a reconfiguring of the power and control of symbolic communication. This does not happen in isolation, but operates in parallel with the structural forces of political discourse and mainstream media, and through the integration of offline cultural frames. Section four (6.4) considers grief in terms of social practice, comparing and contrasting the strategies of grief observable in each case, and what this can tell us about the culture of mourning online. Section five (6.5) examines the broader scripting of social injustice. I argue that the visual rendering of the victims operates in a system of sacred and profane binaries. Furthermore, I examine how sacrality and injustice are performed in the comments section with a particular emphasis on conflict and the pollution of sacred space. The closing section (6.6) reflects on the findings, elaborating on the approach to SMM as a communion of grief previously introduced.

6.2 Defining the terms: witnessing, capture, and public death events

The mediated death event is a problematic construct. The media is saturated with death – from news reports to video games to Hollywood movies – whereby death is both dramatised and banal, inconsequential and entertaining. For a death event to break through this ecology, to be considered as both morally

significant and emotionally traumatic, it must be truly shocking. Traditionally, media curate social responses through established regimes of signification, enacted via celebratory and ultimately conciliatory rituals. In this way, public deaths such as those of Princess Diana or JFK were enmeshed into media events because of the status of the deceased: society predetermines a Royal and a President as grievable. This does not apply to either a student in Tehran or a drummer in London.

For both Neda Soltan and Lee Rigby, the mobile phone played a vital role in elevating their deaths to the status of ‘events’. Both began with a moment of mediatized witnessing: performative rituals of local witnessing for (potentially) global audiences (Scott, 2017, p.3). As Zelizer (1998, p.10) explains, witnessing is implicated in transforming events by either materially altering their course or subsequently impacting our understanding; moments of moral concern that might otherwise have been lost are communicated to the world. Whilst these events were both captured with smartphones and shared via digital media networks, they soon became entwined with traditional media systems (and in truth the two are now inseparable, conceptually and materially). The very moment of Neda’s death was captured on two separate films, shot at close range, whereas Rigby’s death scene was captured on CCTV from some distance. In contrast to the close-ups of Neda’s face as she died, we have long shots of Rigby’s body lying in the road *after* he has died (see figure 6.1).

Not only was this original visual testimony different in form, it was treated very differently by the media. Neda’s death-scene became a viral sensation and was replayed relentlessly across TV channels. As a piece of film it has an almost poetic quality, and one in which there is really only one character: Neda. Somehow the blood that covers her face does so gently, almost without disturbance; the violence of the scene comes from the screams of the onlookers and not, paradoxically, from Neda herself.¹ This creates an intimacy that is

¹This has been a particular point for conspiracy theorists, claiming a blood capsule must

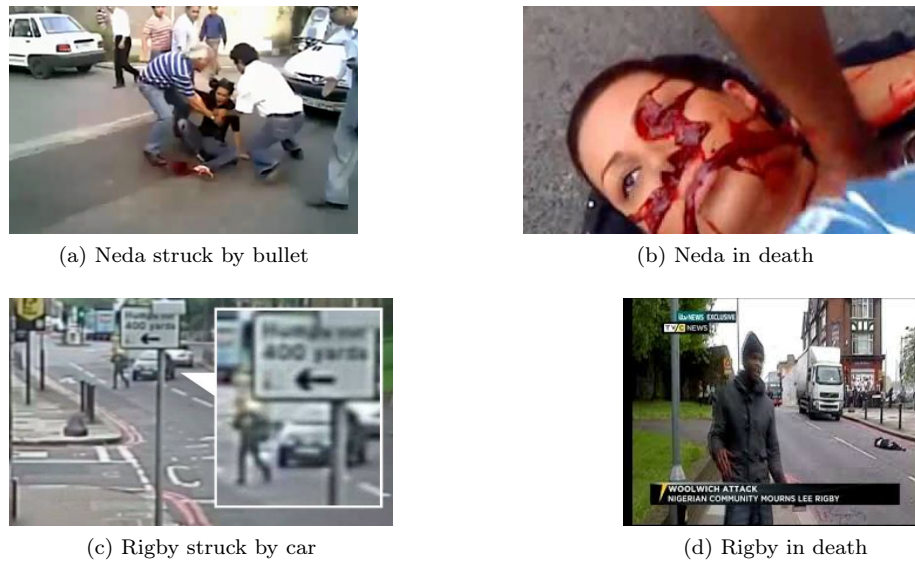


Figure 6.1: Comparative death scenes

deeply discomforting and emotionally overwhelming. Our primary image of Neda is her death-scene: everything else is secondary.

In contrast, Rigby's death scene is both barbarically violent and de-personalised. First rammed by a speeding vehicle, CCTV footage shows Rigby's body cripple under the impact and fall to the ground. Due to the distance and low quality, we cannot make out any personally identifying features. We know that his attackers then attempted to remove his head in an unspeakably violent act, but there is no public footage of this. Instead we have the witness accounts of 'butcher's tools' that we see in the bloodied hands of the killers after-the-fact, but without primary visual evidence there is a distance created between us (the witnessing audience) and the death-scene. The overall story is built from a combination of CCTV and several different phone recordings, and so there is no single, shared unifying account. There is no one film that captures the horror of the event as there is with Neda's death scene.

This has two effects. First, Rigby's media event was never solely about the

have been let off. As is now the norm, there are countless videos on YouTube carrying out pseudo-forensics to this end. This is returned to in section 6.5.2.1.

victim, as was the case with Neda. Adebola's address to camera made powerful news content, full of quotes rich in rhetoric, and so coverage focused on the assailants and their brazen propaganda just as much as on Rigby himself. In fact, there was quite a serious controversy concerning the tone of media coverage, as discussed previously (see 5.3.1). Second, Rigby's death scene does not contain the characteristics that made Neda such a viral phenomenon, and it was not shared in anything like the same way on social media. We are left with three important distinctions between the two cases:

- *Proximity to the moment of death*: Neda's death scene is physically and emotionally much closer than Rigby's due to the conditions of capture. Whilst the images of Rigby's attack are shocking in their violence, the story is ambiguous, requiring contextual knowledge for the full effect to be felt.
- *Central imagery*: Rigby's the death-scene is not captured on any single film in its entirety and requires CCTV footage in combination with as many as four different cameraphone films to understand the full dynamics of the event. In contrast, the two films of Neda each contain all the integral information and imagery.
- *Range of characters*: Past the moment he is struck, Rigby is no longer the sole character. Adebola and Adebola in effect relegate Rigby in terms of visual prominence. The attackers are located directly between Rigby's body and the camera, increasing the physical and narrative distance between the audience and the victim. In contrast, Neda retains a central and singular role in the death scene.

The wider media context is also of note. In Iran, the mainstream media were restricted in the extreme, whilst YouTube was a culturally embedded tool. It was the busiest platform for content sharing around the wider protest movement, and thus it was the most natural space for the evidence to be uploaded (as

discussed in section 3.2.1.2). In contrast, Rigby's death occurred in a much more diverse media ecology. Journalists were on the scene very quickly, able to insert a professional voice whilst police were still gathering evidence and bystanders were still on-the-scene, ready to relay their experiences live to a watching world. So whilst Neda was not *exclusively* a YouTube event, in the immediate aftermath it was predominantly so, whereas reaction to Rigby was much more spread. The effect is one of a *dispersion of attention*, with no central/dominant platform or testimony.

Traditional thinking suggests that media coverage is decided by *proximity* and *scale*: the greater the number of deaths and the closer to home they are, the stronger the media interest, the wider the coverage, and the longer it will last (Sumiala, 2013). We might therefore expect the death of Neda to be significant but relatively brief in terms of coverage. We might also expect Rigby to elicit a somewhat larger response for the same reasons (the location, identity and symbolic potency of his murder, both as a soldier and within the wider narrative of terrorism). Yet this does not hold true.

6.3 The sacralisation of the victim: appropriation, veneration, and grievability

As a death ritual, SMM has a transformative function. With a public death, this ritualised transformation tends towards establishing the dead as a life worthy of public mourning. In SMM, the architecture of grievability has shifted, whereby a networked public is seen to appropriate the emotional fallout and thereby bear influence on the frames of mourning and commemoration. The online space offers very different resources and conditions for framing the dead, not least because access to the means of production is open and interactive.

6.3.1 An appropriation of mourning

It becomes increasingly apparent that the mourning process is appropriated online in response to contextual *needs* of individuals (see Couldry. 2012, pp.162-79). For Neda, traditional outlets for mourning were closed by the state. In addition, the state contested the entire premise of events, claiming that the protesters had murdered Neda, or that it was entirely fake. In Iran, the state exerts significant direct or indirect control of the media, so there were no media or political rituals following the death. Faced with such a traumatic event and with so few options for responding to it, people naturally moved online. In London the conditions were very different. The media were sympathetic and synchronised with official society in horror and condemnation. Yet despite the presence of media rituals, online memorialising flourished. This suggests SMM satiates an emotional need not addressed through traditional systems. A major factor is the *speed* at which SMM can begin to operate (with 85% of the videos being uploaded in the week following Rigby's death; for context, Rigby's funeral was not until 12 July, almost two months later). SMM fills the gap opened by the rupture of a death event, be it temporal, discursive or emotional. In the first instance, it is primarily a *reflexive mode of communication*.

SMM contain a very different set of characteristics to offline mourning and media rituals. These include:

- *Unscripted*. The patterned, formulaic traditions of both funereal and media rituals are disrupted and circumvented. Whilst ritual actions are unscripted and limited only by the platform affordances, they draw heavily from offline resources.
- *Democratic*. Ritual specialists (clergy, military, political, etc.) of official society are replaced by an open, non-hierarchical structure. Participation is open to anyone with internet access.

- *Non-linear*. Ritual time is collapsed, and the mourning process becomes continuous and open.
- *Disembedded*. SMM exists beyond any bounded physical location, blurring the distinction between sacred and mundane spaces and resulting in online platforms being simultaneously both for different actors.
- *Accelerated*. Social media allows for an increased speed in which the mourning process operates, which in turn amplifies the scale on which it takes places.
- *Creative*. The unscripted, democratic nature of SMM, combined with the interactivity of Web 2.0 technology and UGC, results in highly creative and personalised expressions.

(Appendix E presents a full comparative table of death ritual characteristics, from which this summary is derived.)

To appropriate means to take something for one's own use. It is therefore natural that the appropriation of mourning is reflected most heavily through locative signalling, as this is the means by which (You)Tubers physically and conceptually locate the content they upload. Assigning titles, keywords and descriptions might be perceived as relatively minor (in comparison to the hours of work needed to produce the video itself), but locative signalling holds a hierarchical bias in affecting search and retrieval: it drives content, it defines how the videos and the space in which they reside are understood and approached. This is illustrated in figure 6.2. These are KWIC visualisations of whole-corpus video titles that have been mapped via the prepositions 'of' and 'to'. This is for good reason, as prepositions define relationships in time and space: 'of' expresses the connection between a part and a whole, whereas 'to' expresses an aim, purpose or consequence. Adding 'tribute' or 'memorial' will return content that represents a particular social practice, whereas adding 'hero', 'martyr' or similar is a qualitative assessment of the victim and the conditions of their death

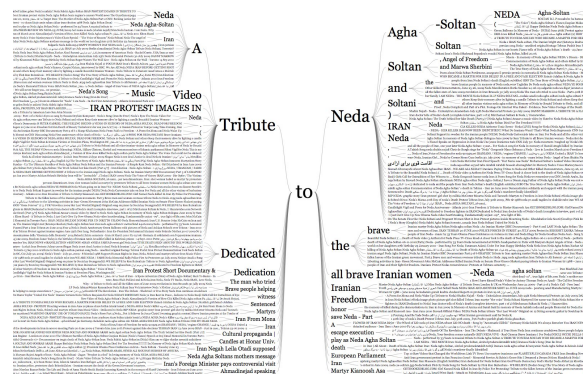
and will return similar but different content. With Neda we observe very clear attributes being assigned to her that are more definitional than descriptive: they are anchored in a set of sacred signifiers that ground the death in the political events yet raise Neda as a victim above and beyond them onto a sacred plane. Rigby's video titles were less explicit in defining sacrality; they are more functional in respect of setting the terms of engagement with the videos (i.e. as memorials). As such, locative signalling acts primarily to define participation as memorialisation, and therefore the viewing of videos is defined as an act of mourning and remembrance.

SMM has an immediacy and intimacy that can be absent from other public forms of mourning. Because it is also interactive, this immediacy has the potential to quickly gain momentum. This momentum, infused with emotion and potent imagery, is entrancing for actors online and highly seductive to mainstream media, thus creating a feedback loop between the two.

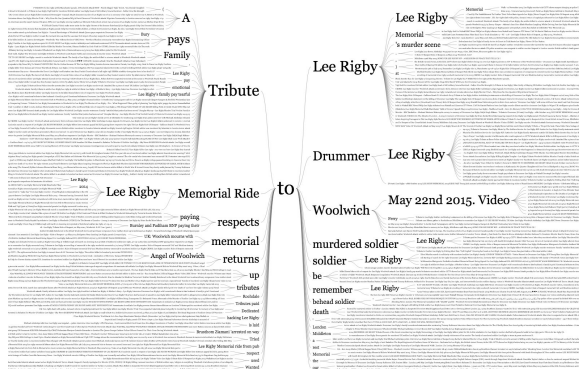
6.3.2 The veneration of the victim

A central strategy for establishing grievability is through the veneration of the victim, and veneration *in extremis* becomes sacralisation. Returning to the locative signalling visualisations, we see a dual function: they both define the function of the video, and they tell a story (this dual function is largely reflected in the top and bottom halves of the visualisations in figure 6.2). This reflects the veneration of the victim within SMM. For Neda this operates as martyrdom whilst for Rigby it is the soldier-hero. The two narratives have common roots.² So the contemporary martyrdom story has the same central ingredients of sacrifice, morality, witnessing and memory. Nuance is removed, the personal narratives of the victims are reformed to suit particular interpretations, positive character traits are amplified, and negative ones are overlooked or dismissed

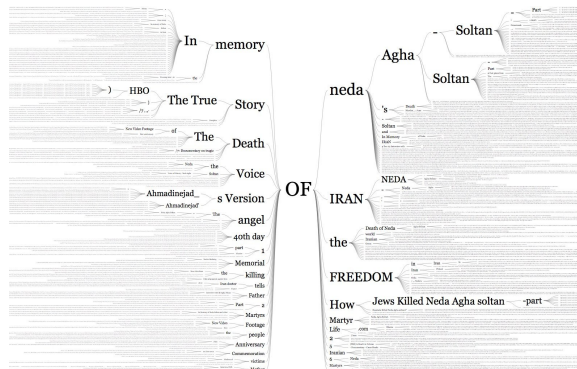
²Although rarely explicitly expressed (in large part because of the terrorist associations with the term) Rigby is also part of a martyr narrative.



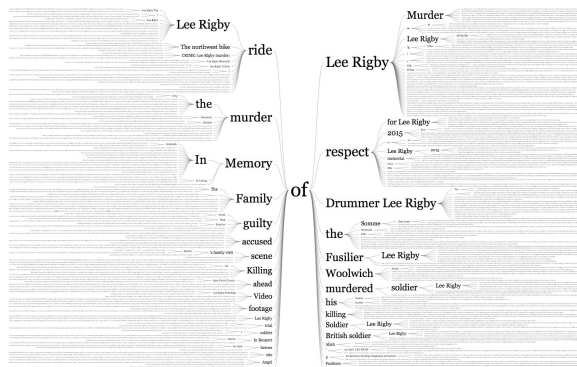
(a) Neda 'to'



(b) Rigby 'to'



(c) Neda 'of'



(d) Rigby ‘of’

Figure 6.2: KWIC visualisations of prepositions in video titles

as irrelevant. Neda becomes purified into twin forms: one the conservative keeper of traditional morals, the other the international symbol of protest and resistance. Neither is true to life. Rigby likewise is transformed from largely ceremonial musician into an all-powerful warrior.

The veneration of the victim is coloured by offline cultural practices, the resources of which are deployed through the affordances of the specific platform in hybrid reformations. Neda's martyrdom is built first from the valorisation of martyrs in modern Iran, whose sacrifice is used to legitimise the regime. Rigby's veneration as the soldier-hero is the evolution of a wider Western mythology of soldiers bearing responsibility for the protection of an entire way of life. The two are more closely linked than one might think, and both have their origins in political propaganda. In Iran this is activated by the *hyper-personalisation* of the war dead through martyrdom portraiture. In Europe the tendency is the opposite: the *de-personalisation* of war dead in uniform graves, sculptures or symbolic tombs (of 'unknown soldiers'). Yet both also have deeper, more theologically infused roots. For Neda, the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali is activated in framing her sacrifice as bound to Shia identity and belief. With Rigby, the reference to existential questions of faith and identity is made via the Crusades and a different version of 'Holy War'. It is no more subtle, but it is certainly less effective. Neda's visual rendering evolves: it moves into different forms, adapted and adopted by various groups with variances in their readings of events. Rigby is much more static. The imagery remains consistent throughout. This is a fixed identity, a strict set of codes and readings that restrict the potential for personalisation and therefore the opportunity for creative engagement.

These frames have contrasting success for good reason. Whilst the Crusades are a shared history for Britain and much of Europe, they are by no means valorised or celebrated in any way comparable to the Battle of Karbala in Iran. The Crusades carry a long, bloody and controversial moral legacy, and are mired in politics and corruption. There is no clear moral message, no defining

victory, and no central narrative (for Catholics or others).³ In contrast, the Battle of Karbala is the point of origin for the Shia faith. It was one short event, it has a clear moral narrative, a small number of central characters, and it retains a very tangible place in the everyday lives of millions of people today. Although ending in tragedy, it has a fairy-tale-like storyline that is accessible and relevant, and as such it is a much more powerful heuristic. It serves to *open out* Neda's martyrdom, anchoring contemporary events in theological issues whilst weighting them with ancient and shared morals. In contrast, as a narrative frame the crusades *close down* Rigby as a figure to venerate. This is not a narrative that invites external viewers; it is not a history with purchase for anyone but fringe groups today. The associations of Knights Templar and the siege mentality with extremist groups such as the EDL and Britain First is alienating, closing access and participation to those who might otherwise wish to participate in SMM.

The point is one of accessibility: *sacralisation must resonate*. It is a question of how death is framed and rendered in the public imagination, and whether that operates within frames that are successful in terms of *clarity*, *inclusivity*, and *morality*. YouTube is an open, interactive space that invites participation. The memorial videos focus the attention of the group on a shared object, but this will not result in a state of 'collective effervescence' if the codes in play do not resonate with the audience.

6.3.3 Grievability

Grievability reflects a judgement value on who legitimately deserves our grief and mourning (Butler, 2009).⁴ Certain deaths carry more weight, some considered

³Although the Roman Catholic Church does define the martyr as one who 'bears witness to the truth and faith of the Christian doctrine', this is not widely known and is certainly not part of the lived experience of faith in the 21st century (Catholic Church, 2000, section 2473).

⁴Butler's thesis has a tendency toward instrumentalism, almost as if the drama of a traumatic death event played out on our TV screens and newspapers is little more than propa-

explicitly more grievable than others: those of women and children, for example (Höijer, 2004; Moeller, 1998). However, Butler's theorising cannot be applied wholesale here because what we might term the 'architecture of grievability' has changed. SMM performs grievability in a manner previously controlled by the state and the professional media. This is again about the cultural and social *proximity* of an event. With Rigby, this process was to be expected as his story is so rich with transferable symbolic renderings. Rigby communicated a cultural proximity for a Western audience predisposed to mourn their war dead *and* the victims of terrorist attacks. These twin frames do not always operate in unison, but the individual weight of each serves to overcome any clash of narrative, each sympathetic witness choosing to orient themselves towards the frame that best reflects their moral concerns back upon themselves. In fact, the 'frames of war' that Rigby operates in can be seen as *lessening* the impact of his death in some ways. Existing frames distance the audience because the death of soldiers has been long established as inevitable yet necessary to fight *our* war on terror: the barbarism of the fundamentalist threat (from al-Qaeda to ISIS) is repeated and the sacrifices we must make are continually emphasised and justified. Granted, it is never suggested that we could or should expect or accept dead soldiers on our own streets, yet we are conditioned to except the sacrifice of our soldiers, and we are conditioned to accept that this is necessary for the protection of society as a whole. Unwittingly, the political discourse around the fight against Islamic terrorism serves to regulate the affective responses to attacks on our *own* soil just as much as it legitimises the loss of life on *foreign* soil.

With Neda the question of grievability is more complicated because SMM operates above and beyond the expected cultural frames. With generations of divisive history creating all manner of discursive boundaries between Iran and

ganda, and the mourning that results is cynical manipulation. This is certainly evident in Butler's readings of the Paris attacks (2015) in which she suggests that public mourning is choreographed for the amplification of police powers that inevitably called for in the wake of such attacks. Whilst Paris is the prism for her thinking, it is presented as generalisable across such terror events. At a certain level this may be true (political rhetoric almost always takes this kind of tone), but the lens of war through which Butler approaches the subject has a narrative clarity that most public death events do not.

the West, it is exceptional that Neda elicited such universal sympathy. According to Butler's thesis, Neda should have been distant, and therefore not grievable to a Western audience. Iranian, dark-skinned, female, Middle Eastern, Muslim: these are not categories with much purchase in the sympathies of the Western imaginary. Rather, these are traditional frames for activating the *otherness* of the enemy, for amplifying the difference and distance between opposing sides. In appropriating the mourning process, SMM undermines and reformulates powerful cultural frames of grievability. As Ahmed (2004a, p.130) observes, there is an intimate relationship between lives that are imagined as grievable and those that are imagined as loveable in the first place. SMM amplifies a rendering of Neda as the femme fatale – the vulnerable, beautiful, exotic female in need of rescue – in such a way that it overpowers the negative frames that might otherwise have hindered her grievability.

This discussion has served to illustrate how:

- Appropriation refers in large part to participants in SMM taking *ownership* of the event and its meaning. Appropriation involves the narrative of the event, the emotional impact of the death, and the moral implications of causes of that death.
- The sacralisation of the victim is a central orientation of SMM, the consensus of which is integral to group solidarity and emotional alignment of the collective. Strategies of veneration bridge historical and contemporary events and local/online cultural practices that articulate the sacred in striking ways.
- Grievability is not determined entirely within SMM but can serve as a powerful counterweight to external forces. The hyper-personalisation of the victim creates a proximity that bears a strong influence on frames of grievability.

6.4 SMM and strategies of grief

Grief is used here as a term to distinguish a context and action rather than defining a particular emotion. Grieving is something we do as a result of emotions and circumstance, a set of contextual social and cultural practices rather than a psychological state.⁵ Christensen and Gotved explain that grief is ‘a quest to re-establish life as a meaningful structure without the deceased and to heal the personal, social, and cultural gap that the death of this person has left behind’ (2016, p.6). Sarah Ahmed tells us that pain (of which grief is a particular form) is not *about* something but *because* of something (2004, p.25). That is to say, it is not the death that causes pain, but the implications for our continued lives, defining a model of pain that is both contingent and inherently social. With the two cases we observe many different grieving practices with distinct patterns and functions. The following account is not exhaustive, but is presented as the key strategies identified through analysis.

6.4.1 The human body as a resource of grief

YouTube affords the user the ability to deploy their own body as a communicative resource for the realisation and performance of grief. In turning the camera upon themselves, (You)Tubers become an embodied tool with which to stimulate affective responses. The insertion of the self into the event is itself strategic, communicating the performer’s commitment to the cause and weighting their response above and beyond other forms of response. The body becomes a vessel for the communication and mediation of affect, and is inserted into both the material frame of the video and the abstracted narrative of the deceased – Neda and the Iranian uprising, or Rigby and the fight against terrorism – communicates an elevated affectation. This creates something of a hierarchy of grief;

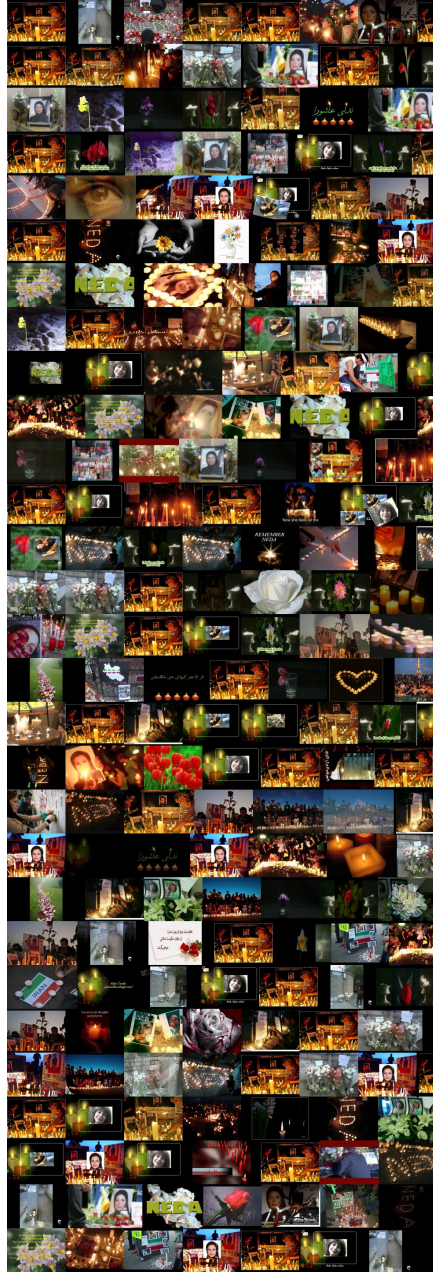
⁵This follows Durkheim’s position that emotions ‘do not originate in any one of the particular individual consciousness’ (Durkheim in Ahmed, 2004, p.11).

it challenges others by declaring ‘*I am so moved that I have written this song: what have you done?*’ Embodied grief is emblematic of participatory media where the self is inserted directly into events in a process of ‘vertical integration’ (Halverson et al., 2013). Distance – be it physical, temporal, emotional or cultural – is reduced; one extra layer of mediation is removed. Whilst this strategy is more prevalent in the Neda corpus, it is significant in each. There are greatly varied levels of professionalism observable in these performance videos. Some are highly polished and some are raw and amateur in style, with the former invariably having more affective impact. These are also much quicker in being uploaded, produced in haste and awash with emotion, rather than a planned, practised and polished performance that can lose something through high production values.

6.4.2 Virtual shrines and grief mnemonics

Perhaps the clearest of all the commonalities between the two cases is the rendering of virtual shrines. Arrangements of candles, flowers and images of the dead appear in almost all the videos. They act as an anchor, emphasising exactly why the video was made. By replicating offline memorial practices, they bring with them expectations of behaviour and the distinction between sacred and profane space. These shrines can be entirely digital (CGI, clip-art, etc.), hybrids with photomontages, or simply documentations of offline shrines.⁶ The spontaneous shrines that formed at the site of Rigby’s attack appear throughout the memorial videos (probably due to the easy access to news images of them). In these virtual shrines, flowers, candles and portraits of the dead combine as grief mnemonics: they become cognitive shortcuts to the larger event. They are accessible and unambiguous symbols of grief. They are often supplemented by other symbols, from the mundane (teddy bears, nature) to the religious

⁶There were no spontaneous shrines in Tehran to be documented, so there are images of the graveside instead.



(a) Virtual shrines to Neda



(b) Virtual shrines to Rigby

Figure 6.3: Virtual shrines made of a normalised sample of images coded ‘shrine’, ‘candle’ or ‘flower’

(crucifix, angels, verses from the Qur'an or Bible). Both are obviously coloured by local traditions – the iconography of Ashura, the Green of both Islam and Iran (and the protest movement itself), or red poppies, military iconography and the red, white and blue of British pageantry – but they serve the same effect. Figure 6.3 puts a composite of the virtual shrines for Neda and Rigby side by side, showing just how similar and repetitive they are. Single frames are often repeated and candles dominate, yet each has a distinct character of its own. These are also not stand-alone constructs: they are conjunctions between the symbolism of heroism, martyrdom, sacrifice, and imagery of the dead, with these simpler universal grief mnemonics. In so doing, these virtual shrines hold the potential for an encounter with the sacred.

In common with offline shrines, (You)Tubers leave prayers, laments, personal reflections and exhortations in the comment threads, reflecting not just the reverence of the dead, but the perception that the dead bridge the lived world and some higher state (religious, epistemic, moral). This connects the individual in a public display of allegiance and emotional alignment. This also extends our thinking on witnessing, as participation marks users out as *active witnesses* to events – in distinction from the passive or voyeuristic *watchers* – because witnessing carries a moral sentiment. Emotional responses are elevated from being seen as some banal or narcissistic performance of the self to assume the status of moral judgements of the events witnessed. It is a powerful force for (You)Tubers to feel that sense of belonging and participation, validating their emotions and recovering a sense that their contribution matters.

The manner in which YouTube acts as a surrogate space when the offline is unavailable is made explicitly clear if we look at the patterns of comment activity over time. Figure 6.4 plots the comment activity across the whole corpus of Neda videos on a polar axis, where $r = \text{time}$, and $\theta = \text{date}$.⁷ As we would expect, there is a huge amount of activity in the immediate aftermath of the event, which

⁷Comment postings are time stamped (to the second), and are plotted so that any radial line represents a 24 hour period.

gradually reduces over time. After this dies down, we observe a striking cycle of activity over a very short period of time. This correlates with the fortieth day following Neda's murder, a day known as *Arba'een*. This is the usual length of mourning in most Muslim traditions, and is particularly significant for the Shia faith. Offline, there were increased protests, and heightened emotions and attention. Falling on the eighth day of the Persian month of Mordad, huge crowds gathered at the Beheshteh-Zahra cemetery (where many thousands of martyrs of the Iranian Revolution are buried), and #8mordad was trending on Twitter. The final outer ring of activity on the visualisation correlates with the anniversary of Neda's death.

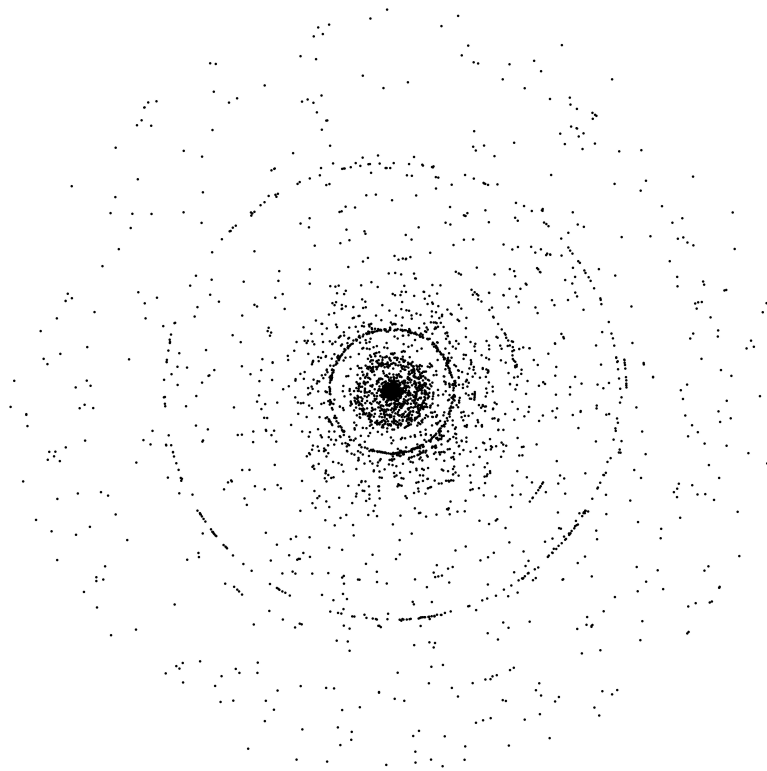


Figure 6.4: Comment activity over time on a polar axis, Neda (whole corpus)

There is a complete contrast with a similar visualisation of the comment activity on the Rigby memorial videos (see figure 6.5, again where $r = time$, and

$\theta = \text{date}$). Whilst we can observe a similar pattern in the single outer ring of activity, this is an anomaly. This surge in comments is attributable to one tribute, ‘Yung’Gee - See You Again ft. joegarratt (Wiz Khalifa Cover)’, released in 2015, which sampled a famous song that is listed in the description. This was also by a semi-professional band, and therefore had a popularity and reach outside of the regular processes of SMM. There are no long-term patterns of use for Rigby except to say that it drops off sharply. Just a year after events, there is an eleven-month hiatus with no comments whatsoever, suggesting that the emotional need for YouTube to serve as a space of mourning was no longer present.⁸

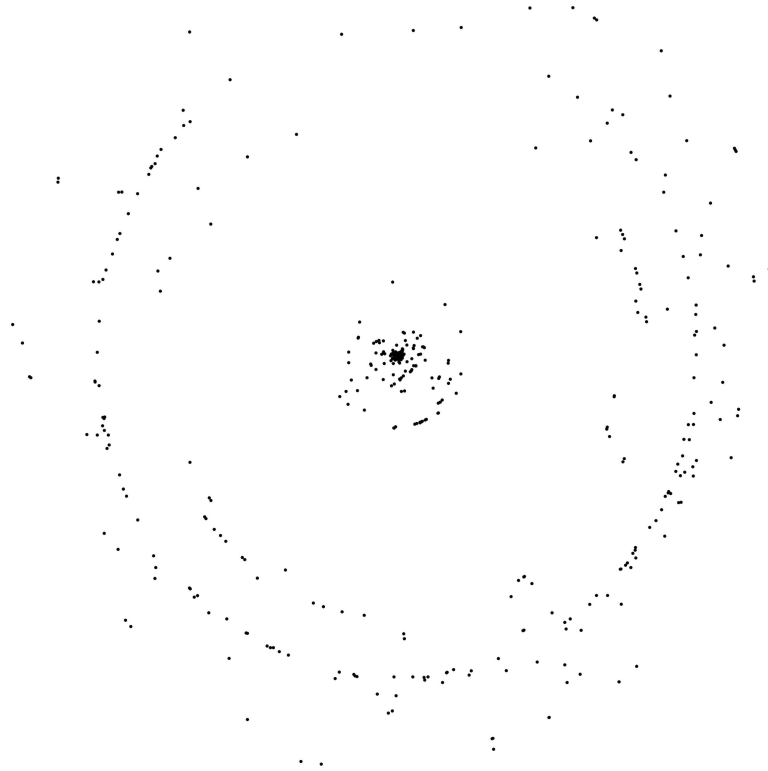


Figure 6.5: Comment activity over time on a polar axis, Rigby (whole corpus)

⁸At the time of writing it is not possible to access data concerning the times of video *viewing*. If this were possible, we would have a much better idea of this patterns, as comment thread activity is minimal in comparison to viewing figures.

6.4.3 Music

If the visual element of a video focuses our attention, it is the soundtrack that amplifies and makes common our emotional experience. Music has a long tradition in response to traumatic loss and mourning, and on YouTube soundtracking videos is one of the most common and popular aspects of the site (Hillrichs, 2016). When grieving, music can bring comfort, provide a sense of belonging, hope or triumph, or simply provide escape. There is a vast array of musical styles in the corpus that are used for an equally broad range of affects, but nonetheless patterns do emerge. We might expect mourning music to be reverential, hushed, restrained and measured in order to evoke reflection and a sense of timelessness, and to allow the listener what Kuntsman (2012) calls ‘an ambience of spaciousness’. Whilst some videos do follow these traditional rules, they are by no means absolute. Table 6.1 charts the main musical genres present in the video tributes, and the first observation is the prevalence of pop music and soundtracks from film and television.⁹ At times these can feel crude and insensitive, such as the soundtrack to *Forest Gump* playing over violent images from Tehran, or a karaoke-level rendition of Mariah Carey’s ‘Hero’ in combination with images of military graves. Yet they clearly communicate something powerful for both the producers and consumers of content. They universalise the experience of watching by anchoring emotional sentiments in a set of easily accessible signifiers. Film soundtracks and international pop hits by the likes of Coldplay and U2 are simple, perhaps even shallow, resources to draw from, but they are vast and valuable because the barriers to entry are so low. The sentimentalised soundtracks of Hollywood movies are designed to invoke exaggerated reactions, and they are composed to be as accessible as possible for a

⁹The category of ‘pop’ music is large and complex, especially considering the context. Whilst most pop music in the UK has an international reach, Iranian music does not due to a number of cultural and structural reasons. However, I included Iranian music in this category because it is deployed in the same way. Analysis was developed with several sub-categories, but they do not help to make the point here: that popular, easily accessible and remediated commercial music is used that communicates commonality and is anchored in shared frames of experience.

Table 6.1: Taxonomy of soundtracking types

	Neda (n=96)	Rigby (n=32)	Total
Pop music	35%	46%	38%
Film/TV soundtrack	10%	6%	9%
Poetry	16%	0%	12%
Religious	4%	3%	4%
Protest song	6%	3%	5%
Original composition	22%	16%	20%
Classical	7%	25%	11%

global market. The fact that music strengthens social bonds is well established (DeNora, 2000; Skånland & Trondalen, 2014), and in the context of SMM, music acts as a bridge between events, emotions and the vast audience watching. Music can be seen to amplify affect, drop barriers to entry, and increase the reach of SMM.

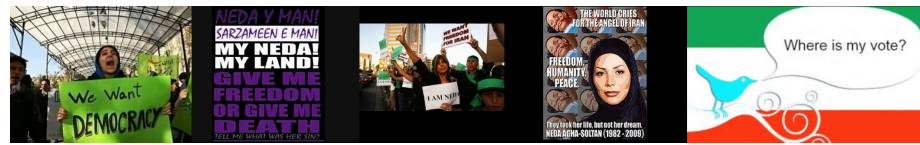
How (You)Tubers select their music is beyond my ability to determine here, but one incidence illustrates the closeness of the two cases. Two videos, ‘DRUMMER LEE RIGBY Tribute’ (Amanda Lewis, 2013) and ‘Neda Soltan - Payame Neda Poem’ (IranBrave, 2009) use the same piece of instrumental violin music by Ji Pyeong Kwon. It is melancholic, sombre and yet still quite beautiful, all the elements that make it suited for a memorial video. But it is the title, ‘Sad Romance’ (renamed ‘Sad Violin’ by fans), the soundtrack to a 2003 Korean TV drama series *Over the Green Fields*, that is worthy of further thought. It is not too much to conclude that these (You)Tubers simply googled ‘sad music’ in search of a suitable soundtrack to their tribute. In fact, almost every web listing of the song has the two titles together (as in ‘Sad Romance (A.K.A. Sad Violin)’), thus increasing the chance of it appearing in a search return due to the repetition. Suddenly the web seems much smaller. The ability of music to bridge time and space through shared associations and memories is where its power lies.

In a true reflection of the creativity of SMM, one fifth of all videos contain an original piece of music or poetry. These vary between ballads, solemn poems

and rock music, and are closely linked to the bodily performance of affect discussed above, as so many original pieces are performed directly to camera. In a reflection of cultural differences, poetry does not appear at all in the Rigby corpus, but as a much more everyday art form in Iran is present in 16% of Neda's tributes, again highlighting how the offline colours the online. The music and poetry written in direct response to events is now an important part of the historical record, capturing the emotional form of events in another modality. Because these tributes live on in perpetuity on the internet, they have a lasting legacy on how events are remembered. This might well be disproportionate in the long term, as news media coverage sinks away, but SMM remains (relatively) easily accessible. The cultural documentation and retelling of events are now complete with their own soundtracks, which will continue to impact future interpretations of them.

6.4.4 Presencing grief

Presencing grief refers directly to the way in which (You)Tubers locate their emotional response to events in space and time, and holds particular importance in the function of comment thread activity. The use of the first person address is important, as is a direct link between (You)Tubers and their experience of the death event. Presencing grief means personalising it, linking the self to the event and the shared emotional experience. Rituals are inherently performative; they are 'acts done...codified repeatable actions' (Schechner, 1987, p.613). Thus, we see stylised, reductive statements in the comments sections that would be strange and out of place on any other type of video: GBNF, R.I.P., Never Forget, God Bless, etc. These repetitive modes of address are vital in performing the sacrality of the space and validating the participation of users. It is useful to think of the building blocks of ritual made up from simple, non-utilitarian ritual acts, that when concentrated (and often ordered) constitute complex ritual acts, which in turn combine to become ritual performances.



(a) Neda. Action is future orientated



(b) Rigby. Action is past orientated

Figure 6.6: Presencing grief manifests in different orientations

Thus, both prayer and active remembering are forms of presencing. The speed and scale of these utterances is cumulative and have a powerful momentum. These repetitive statements are not about their descriptive content, but rather the power they hold in focusing the attention of the group and in channelling collective emotions. These declaratives give a direction to grief, and combine to establish a fundamental sense that *contribution matters*. Presencing grief in this way is observed to result in two quite different stances between the two cases. For Neda, this is future orientated, calling forth an *imperative to act*: stand up, resist, fight, and stay strong. For Rigby it is orientated to the past, manifesting as an *imperative to remember*: don't forget, remember, resist, fight, and stay strong. In many ways, they amount to the same thing: defiance in the face of trauma; solidarity in the face of crisis. Yet one is *offensive* and the other is *defensive*; one is made from a (perceived) position of power and strength, the other from a (perceived) position of weakness and threat.

The strategies of grief identified here illustrate how:

- Virtual shrines, music, and iconic imagery are used in similar ways in the achievement of similar ends. Grief mnemonics work to signal behaviours and provide accessible and simple means of conveying emotions. However, highly specified and contextual strategies of grief personalise death events and their conditions.

- As strategic action, we can understand these mediatized rituals as symbolic demarcations of identity in a particular moment of space and time (Koster, 2003), and as affective practices these are inherently interpersonal and dialogic (Wetherell, 2012, p.87).
- Grief is both performed and performative. That is to say, grief requires externalising, and in so doing it acts to constitute that to which it refers.
- The performance of grief results in contrasting positions of offence and defence in each case. With Neda, a sense of hope and inevitable victory amplifies the emotional energy of the ritual that is welcoming and inclusive. With Rigby, a sense of threat and vulnerability endures, closing down participation.

6.5 Scripting social injustice: symbolism, opposition, and contestation

The term ‘scripting’ is borrowed from Dayan and Katz (1992) and refers to the way media events determine the distribution of roles within an event and the ways these are enacted. It is also resonant with Alexander’s (2006) notion of the theatrical performance of social ritual. Scripting concerns the construction and activation of a central narrative. Here, narrative does not mean a single story, but rather a complex *system of stories* with shared elements that draw on one another at different points in space and time. As Branigan notes: ‘Narrative is a recursive organisation of data; that is, its components may be embedded successively at various micro and macro levels of action’ (1992, p.18).

This idea of the scripting of social injustice is therefore premised on the observation that these deaths contain a *sense* of social injustice. These deaths were not simply random acts of violence, but were calculated, entirely avoidable, and profoundly immoral. They reflect moral and political transgressions,

and they motivate debates of collective perceptions of right and wrong, of what is held sacred to a social group, however defined (Olesen, 2015). They were *felt* as a profane intrusion into the foundational ideology of a free, tolerant and democratic society. There are many subtle ways that these scripts are constructed, but here I review the three main elements that arose from the empirical chapters: symbolic imagery, oppositions, and contestation.

The scripting of social injustice requires the victim and the death event to be explicitly located within an existing frame of reference. To truly have impact, this needs to bridge local events and universal moral ideals. How well formed the existing frames are defines the kind of work required in the scripting process. This was previously discussed in the sacralisation of the victims, but is worth recounting for clarity:

- The Iranian revolts operated within global narratives linking human progress with democracy, human rights, equality and enfranchisement.
- The protesters were largely outward looking, young and middle class: easy and accessible subjects for the watching audience.
- The Iranian state played their role as ‘Evil Perpetrators’ as to script: decrying the death as fake, refuting responsibility, threatening the family, denying rights, and committing acts of violence.
- The abundance of accessible visual material gives rise to twin representations of Neda that could be self-selected according to the individual’s personal stance.
- Neda’s death scene provided a single image that explicitly captured the conditions of her death. The addition of graphic styles in the tradition of international protest movements added another layer of complexity and accessibility, giving it memetic qualities.

For Rigby, the existing frames of reference were:

- Rigby's death was placed first and foremost in the global struggle against Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.
- As a serving soldier, Rigby was a protector of the nation: a venerated, sacred role that carries the unquestioning loyalty of a large part of the British population.
- Rigby's attackers also played the role of 'Evil Perpetrator' explicitly but their media coverage superseded that of Rigby at times.
- The available visual material was relatively limited. The majority of images show Rigby in military dress, which played well to a certain demographic but closed down accessibility.
- Rigby's death scene did not result in any single iconic image.¹⁰ As a result, visual renderings had to imply the conditions of death rather than explicitly displaying them.

6.5.1 Symbolic imagery

Both death events were ripe with symbolism, and both proved rich for remediation. The same resource that brings distant death into our personal space also provides a vast affective library for us to draw from as we explore and form new meaning-making practices. The image – both in terms of personal capture and of increasing valorisation as a primary communicative tool – is a central mechanism of ritual. As Collins (2004, p.37) observes, when an object comes to embody a collective emotion in this way, a new sacred object is born. However, the result is one in which Neda became an international symbol of social injustice, whereas Rigby represented such a symbol to a small and quite narrowly defined group. The evolution of Neda's visual form was vast and diverse, resulting in many highly abstracted and stylised forms, whereas Rigby largely

¹⁰Appearing just once in the corpus, constituting just 0.8% of the visual data.

remained in the same visual form throughout. Some of this can be attributed simply to scale: with so many more iterations and participants in the case of Neda, there is bound to be more diversity. However, this is not the entire answer. There is something about the accessibility of Neda's narrative that was more amenable to personalisation, appropriation and creative reimagining. The fairy-tale script – like a princess awaiting rescue – invites creative, exaggerated storytelling. Rigby's is more of a *Boy's Own* tale: masculine, blunt, and literal. Instead of being reimagined, Rigby was *augmented* with images that reiterate underlying military symbolism: tanks, planes, poppies, graves, flags, etc.

Symbolic imagery allows for the narrative of injustice to move across time, space and cultural domains at rapid pace and with great affect. Digital images operate in natively digital conditions; they become 'sticky' with affect (Ahmed 2004), and they reverberate through the 'affective fabrics' of the digital space (Kuntsman, 2012), becoming in one sense the *actualisers of affect*. They transfer violence and trauma of the event to a wider witnessing audience, taking on what Couldry calls a 'materiality of representation' (2012, p.30). These images act as both testimony to the event, and as moral commentary on them.

6.5.2 Oppositions: victims and perpetrators

Any narrative needs both a hero and a villain, and the most powerful injustice symbols define the victims, their perpetrators, and the causal chain between the two (Olesen, 2013, p.3). Victim status reflects a lack of power and agency (Andersson, 2008). This is equally applicable to the community in which the attack takes place as it is to the victim themselves. Injustice reflects a sense of impotence in the face of powerful forces. In Iran, Neda's murder was a terrifying reminder of the ruthless and absolute power of the regime. As a political statement it was unambiguous, confirming that anyone protesting was doing so at the potential cost of his or her life. Neda presented the protest

movement with a symbol with which to communicate the immorality of the situation to a global audience.

In Britain, the dynamic was quite different. For most of society, the attack was felt as a threat to personal agency because it defined the possibility that this could happen to anyone, at anytime. Yet for a disproportionately vocal group aligned with the political far right, Rigby's murder was confirmation of a pre-conceived belief that Islam represents a direct threat to their way of life. Thus, the far right has already cast itself as the victim in the wider narrative. Rigby provided far-right groups with an iconic symbol that legitimised their position, thus empowering them. The online space provided a space and opportunity to articulate and defend this position.

Agency can be returned either through directly setting out an argument, or by strategically locating oneself within a collective body that supports one's ideas. Whilst similar strategies for doing so were observed in both cases, they diverge in how this translated into positive and negative stances. With Neda, taking a stance of resistance was emancipatory, but with Rigby it was reductive and disempowering. The Iranian protestors were on an upward trajectory, were empowered by events and were convinced Neda's sacrifice in combination with their political momentum would ultimately bring victory. This resulted in a positive sentiment of hope. In Britain – and for the far right in particular – the attack on Rigby was confirmation of a defensive position of relative weakness. This resulted in predominantly negative sentiments of anger and threat.

The reason for defining the perpetrator (in opposition to the victim) is the simple truth that it is vital for any good story. It gives the narrative clarity and strength, and it frames events in categories of opposites. These events are already cast within existential struggles – revolution on the one hand, and war on the other – and as such the distinction between victims and perpetrators becomes conjoined with representations of the sacred and profane. I refer back to Gordon Lynch's powerful definition of the sacred as 'what people collectively

Table 6.2: Comparative sacred-profane classifiers

RIGBY SMM FRAMEWORK		NEDA SMM FRAMEWORK	
SACRED NATION	PROFANE IDEOLOGY	SACRED MOVEMENT	PROFANE REGIME
Pure	Polluted	Peaceful	Violent
Righteous	Immoral	Righteous	Immoral
Strong	Unstable	Just	Unjust
Predictable	Erratic	Natural	Corrupted
Enlightened	Primitive	Inevitable	Temporary
Legitimate	Illegitimate	Authentic	Artificial
Rational	Emotional	Common	Elite
Intelligent	Ignorant	Modern	Primitive
Controlled	Violent	Rational	Self-interest
Respected	Feared	Freedom	Repression
Civilised	Barbaric	Democracy	Dictator
Benefactor	Parasitic	Equality	Inequality
Progressive	Regressive	Intelligent	Ignorant

experience as absolute, non-contingent realities which present normative claims over the meanings and conduct of social life' (2012a, p.29). Thus, every element of the storytelling around these events becomes cast in terms of good vs evil, or the sacred vs the profane. These classification frames were recorded in the tables 4.5 and 5.7 in the previous two chapters. Table 6.2 shows these side by side, and we see the similarities between each in stark relief. This is a blunt illustration of ritual's tendency towards oversimplification, amplification, and dramatisation.

6.5.2.1 The contestation of grievability

It might seem strange that events with such seemingly clear conditions are contested at all, especially considering the centrality of digital witnessing and visual testimony. But both events are actively contested in the comment sections, marking SMM with a distinct characteristic from other commemorative practices. On SNS, disruptive voices are to be expected but the extreme nature of these interactions can shed light on other dynamics. This is not trolling, taken as the deliberate sowing of dissent simply for the sake of it. Rather, the contestation of grievability here is a mixture of conspiracy, fakery, lies, and pro-

vocations, but the thinking appears to be genuinely felt. It is neither rational, convincing, nor particularly clever, but it does not need to be if it is to be effective. They are not designed to be countered, discussed or disputed through nuanced debate. This is not any kind of rational public sphere: it is unambiguously the phatic over the factual. This is about the speaker using rhetorical forms to *externalise* the argument, whilst *internalising* the meaning of events.

Across the two cases the contestation of grievability is highly formulaic, claiming the events were faked in one way or another. With Neda, the claim is that the CIA, Mossad, or any other shadowy Western agency has staged the event to damage the regime. There is much discussion of the blood being too red, the speed of the death being suspicious, the proximity of the witnesses, a lack of visible wounds, etc. The death videos are dissected with obsessive precision. With Rigby it is much the same. The obscured details of the body, the lack of blood, the speed of the car and any number of other details are used to claim a conspiracy. It is even claimed that Rigby is a completely fictional person. The alleged motivation for the conspiracy is also the same: to perpetuate conflict and increase the power of Western government/military forces both externally and in respect to their legislative powers in their own countries. Table 6.3 illustrates the startling similarities between the conspiracy theorists.

For those that ascribe to conspiracies, the contestation of grievability still reflects a social trauma, but of a different kind. These memorials simply confirm to them once again all that is wrong with the world: they believe themselves to be privy to a great lie *that most people don't realise*. And this is key: it reflects the perception of the conspiracy theorists that they are alone, isolated, and vulnerable. They believe they are privy to some exceptional specialist knowledge, which gives them an insight that the 'normal' people do not understand. This is highly comparable to the enlightened discourse of the religious: the premise of a specialist knowledge elevates and releases those exceptional people entrusted with 'The Truth'. Yet with this truth comes the price of isolation and vulner-

ability, and what these people really need is confirmation, consideration, and agreement, because quite frankly it is disconcerting in the extreme to be privy to some exceptional information that purports to be fundamental to the foundation of society. There is undoubtedly hyperbolic grandstanding: the use of insult and intimidation, grand declaratives, etc., but it betrays an underlying anxiety, a precariousness to the situation.

Table 6.3: Conspiracy theorists

Name	Video	Date	Comment
NormVigas	Tribute video R.I.P Lee Rigby Gone But Never Forgotten	06.11.2013 14:16:00	Anyway, this whole thing was a false flag, done by the real criminals of the people, the UK banks and their puppet government shite, done to take yet more freedoms, from those who lie and cheat us all!
mauren3	Tribute video R.I.P Lee Rigby Gone But Never Forgotten	30.05.2013 12:11:55	Please have a look at WOOLWICH FALSE FLAG EXPOSED STAGED EVENT and Woolwich - MAN WALKS THROUGH BLOOD EXCEPT IT'S NOT THERE So much that just defies common sense!
literaturereview	RIP Neda Soltani, Neda! Don't Be Scared, Neda! Stay! Neda! Don't Go!	24.06.2009 17:40:38	NEDA is alive and well. Video was staged to be later exposed" as fake murder organized by "Mousavi supporters", with one of those CIA actors helping actress
Kieran.darragh	Neda Agha Soltan, killed 20.06.2009, Presidential Election Protest, Tehran, IRAN	12.03.2011 14:59:23	This fake video is carefully created by ultimate enemy of Iran.

This can be explained if we return to the healing power of ritual. The highly repetitive nature of these conspiracy theories shows how ritualised they have become, and as such they serve the same purpose as any ritual: solidarity, healing, validation and support. Disruptive narratives serve exactly the same purpose

as consensual ones do: through scripting injustice they provide solace. It is a question of taking control. When there is injustice, opposition is reaffirming. Even though the details of the events are in dispute, *the presence of a social injustice is not*. For those that claim conspiracy, the injustice is simply different, but largely attributable to similar stereotyped bogeymen. It remains a question of agency, of not being in control. By claiming conspiracy, one is able to reclaim agency. As such we can observe this apparently disruptive aspect as actually being highly productive. The opposing narratives become entwined in what I term an *obligate conflict*, whereby each requires the oppositional force to maintain their own internal validity (Scott, 2016b). They serve to authenticate and legitimise each other, and increase the temporal lifespan of each. The truth is that conspiracy theories can be powerful coping mechanisms. They work by avoiding or negating difficult truths and by imposing order on chaos. Conspiracy theories follow any traumatic event as sure as night follows day: they are formulaic, structured and predictable. In many ways, they are ritualised themselves, and this is the point: conspiracy theories provide comfort through the suggestion that someone is in charge of all this, that there is a reason for this disorder and injustice, and that is the same thing that SMM does more widely. Conspiracies are in many ways the bastard child of SMM.

This discussion has shown how:

- Social injustice exists only as much as it is *felt* by actors. To become *seen* it must be scripted.
- Symbolic imagery allows social injustice narratives to move across time and space. Iconic imagery is deployed in implicit and explicit forms to amplify the symbolism of both victims and events. The form of imagery that the victims evolve into is a complex mix of offline cultures and online practices.
- Defining the roles of victim and perpetrator is essential for a powerful

injustice narrative.

- The contestation of the injustice script helps entrench a sense of community amongst mourners, enforces sacred/profane boundaries, providing a sense of absolution.

6.6 SMM and the communion of grief

Jeffrey Alexander suggests that traumas such as public deaths become cultural events through a ‘spiral of signification’, whereby a community constructs its own narratives around the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, the attribution of responsibility, and the victim’s significance to the social group (Alexander 2013, pp.17-20). Underlying this is a claim of fundamental injury that is shared by the group (or at least is met with an emotional sympathy that might grow in the fullness of time). A trauma that is collective therefore resonates on a deeply moral, ethical line that is felt as a profanation of some sacred held value that carries with it a demand for emotional, social and symbolic repair. So the community that might take shape is not one born of rational reflection but one driven by emotion and moral alignment. And the larger the trauma, the greater the need for ritual communication to perform repair. Accordingly, SMM serves two major roles for the community: it helps the social group cope with the social and cultural consequences of death, and it alleviates the collective fear of death that is particularly important in our context. In the previous chapters I have made the case for thinking about SMM in terms of a *communion of grief*, and it is not necessary to retread those arguments here. Instead, we can begin to see why this communion is so important to people.

SMM operates through various frames. It serves to script injustice, constructing a broad narrative that is comprehensible at a time when sureties are upended. It provides an outlet for grief in which individuals can locate themselves in

time, space and emotional responses. And SMM acts to sacralise the victims in a manner that serves the moral sentiments of those who participate. The affordances of the YouTube platform focus attention on the shared social practice of mourning. Participation is validated by participation: highly emotional, personal and private behaviours are legitimised in the safety of the space. As a result, we observe a sense of absolution, or at least a gradual transference of responsibility. In defining those responsible, and narrating them in an explicit framework of good vs evil, of right vs wrong, the communion gathered in grief draws some sense of relief and comfort from knowing that this might be understandable, and that this event does not represent a fundamental rupture in society but a temporary and repairable fracture. Even if explanations are found in far-fetched conspiracy theories, the net result is the same.

Ritual is primarily for those left behind, and what matters is the cultural and social proximity of the tragedy. This is not a question of geography but of attachment and identification. Traditional media events can hold our attention and strengthen existing bonds, but it is a stretch to suggest that they might help construct new ones. Social media allow for people to establish personal communities, chosen by individuals rather than being prescribed by factors beyond their control: ethnicity, religion, gender, etc.

6.7 Conclusion

Throughout the thesis I have followed two analytical themes: the first is concerned with how the online space mediates the death event, and the second with the type of memorialising practices this mediation gives rise to. These two themes have converged in this chapter. The catalyst for each event was a tragic, shocking murder broadcast to the world. The analysis has shown that witnessing testimony is central both within the wider media event and as an internal driver of action and gaze within SMM. Neda's death scene had such

clear cinematic qualities that it went viral on a global scale and was recreated endlessly online. As a result, Neda remains in a ceaseless liminal state between life and death, earning her the accolade of the first truly Digital Martyr. For Rigby, the death scene itself had less clarity and entered a much more complex media environment. Thus it was not Rigby's moment of death that became most widely appropriated, but rather his idealised rendering as the soldier-hero, ripe and accessible as it was for a symbolic reimagining. Both deaths are connected through the notion of martyrdom and its origins in sacrifice, witnessing, and morality. The participants of SMM help define how this evolves on a wider social scale: as Middleton observes, 'the central character is not the most important element in the creation of a martyrdom; it is the narrator' (2014, p.130). Where the cases diverge is in their respective resonance online, for whilst Neda managed to overcome previously established barriers to grievability – ethnicity, religion, and gender, to name but a few – and rise up to the level of global icon, Rigby did not.

Fundamentally, SMM represents an appropriation of the mourning process. Networked media contain the potential to reformulate the means of symbolic production away from the entrenched systems of official society and towards a networked public. This is neither absolute nor stable, and anything that occurs online cannot be understood outside the wider offline context, yet SMM nevertheless embodies a wider cultural trend in this way. Using a comparative account, this chapter has discussed two very different events in terms of scale, location and context. What emerges is complex and multifaceted.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This thesis has endeavoured to bring understanding to the emergent phenomenon of mass-participatory online mourning rituals that follow public death events. I have offered the term Social Media Memorialising to capture this. This chapter serves as a synthesis of the findings and a reflection on the major contributions of the study. I begin by laying out the central arguments that underpin this thesis (7.2). This is followed section 7.3 responds directly to the research questions set out in chapter one. Section 7.4 considers these findings in respect to their contribution to the field and implications for theory. Section 7.5 reflects upon the limitations of the study and suggests avenues for further research.

7.2 Theorising SMM: central arguments

Throughout this thesis I have continually referred to and defined a particular type of death event which serves to capture the attention of a global audience in

profound ways. These types of shocking and highly politicised deaths are, unfortunately, not new, but the emergence of mass-participatory, interactive and open online memorial rituals is. I have developed the term ‘Social Media Memorialising’ (SMM) to capture this phenomenon, for which I offer the following definition:

SMM is a performative and commemorative media phenomenon that occurs in response to public death events. Participation is self-motivated but equally collective and interactive. It is marked by open participation structures, sociopolitical contingency, fluidity, and the centrality of User Generated Content. SMM is an emotional response to a traumatic death event, and an active commentary on the conditions of that death.

This thesis set out to investigate how SMM functions as a cultural mechanism in response to public death events. With this as the point of departure, the central arguments of this thesis are:

- SMM constitutes an *appropriation of the process of public mourning*. Digital media reconfigure frames of grievability whereby the means of symbolic production have shifted in control away from media and political gatekeepers and towards networked publics. This shift is not absolute, nor is it stable, but it is significant and it is enduring.
- Social media serve to mediate the dead through novel, powerful and social forms of grieving which are a hybrid of offline and online practices. They are innovative, strategic and performative, and are articulated through a *platform-specific vernacular of grief*, and thereby illustrating that processes of ritualisation can flourish in the online spaces of SNS.
- SMM forms a *networked communion of grief*: a temporary community bound by mediated events and their ritualised reaction to them. Inclusion is defined by moral alignment, participation is open and actively encouraged, and validity and legitimacy are established through participation.

These arguments illustrate why this thesis is, ultimately, an examination of power in the networked society. SMM is much more than a historical recording of events, and instead socially constructs and symbolically renders them for the consumption of the wider watching public. It is for this reason that the appropriation of public mourning is so significant, as SMM represents the ability of networks to undermine the entrenched power of hierarchies: a shift in control from the gatekeepers of old toward a networked public.

7.3 Key findings

The following section substantiates the central arguments above in respect to the specific research questions set out in chapter one.

7.3.1 Platform vernacular and SMM on YouTube: mediating the public death event

Research Question 1: *What is the vernacular of SMM on YouTube, and how does this impact the public death as a sociocultural event?*

The notion of the *platform vernacular* is a concept that allows us to approach SMM on YouTube as a form of everyday media practice (Gibbs et al., 2015, p.257).¹ YouTube memorialising is vernacular in form primarily because it is *of the people*. The hosted content is a form of communicative expression available to all (with just an internet connection and the simplest of software). It is vernacular because it is part of an increasing vocabulary through which individuals enact themselves as their own subjects.²

¹The discussion in chapter two, section four, illustrated the diverse forms of memorialising that have appeared online. I argued that the proliferation of formalised, commercial platforms that re-create the cemetery format are of use for conceptualising SMM because they are little more than a digital reproduction of offline rituals. Instead, it is the subversive use of SNS that is important.

²Despite the desire to ‘discover’ something revelatory in the corpus, it must not be overlooked that YouTube is primarily a place of frivolous entertainment for the vast majority of

The following categories represent the distinguishing vernacular characteristics of SMM on YouTube based on the evidence gathered, analysed and critiqued. They are presented in an analytical sequence but should not be read as referencing temporality. Whilst the platform design defines a sequential experience in terms of search, retrieval and content consumption, this is: (1) limited to the individual at the single page experience only; (2) upended when approached as content production; and (3) incidental in terms of the wider event when the corpus is considered in its entirety. SMM impacts the death event in several distinct ways pertaining to: the victim; the mediated witnesses that gather in a communion of grief; and the narrative of injustice that defines these events. Exactly how this operates depends on the conditions of the death events and the creativity of (You)Tubers. This discussed in turn of each vernacular expression below.

7.3.1.1 Sacralisation of the victim

The sacralisation of the victim refers to the transformative way in which the victim is venerated. Analysis has shown that in both cases and across all the videos the dead are remediated almost to the point of commodification. Whether through the creation of iconic imagery, song, or the building of consensus BTL, the dead are appropriated and redeployed in servitude to the subjunctive sentiments of (You)Tubers. Sacralisation is sometimes explicitly assigned (martyrdom, heroism, etc.), and sometimes the result of a multitude of small remediations. The way the dead are articulated in the various modalities of YouTube is indicative of a social trauma. The sacred significance of this trauma is due in large part to the deeply felt shared moral commitment to the idea of a free

(You)Tubers. It is a mundane space, one where anonymity is actively encouraged, and any 'community' that we might think of has come together due to content rather than any social, political or cultural connection: an important observation. Thus, our consideration of mourning practices must be within the context of YouTube's aesthetics, sociality and behavioural norms just as much as it must account for the more dramatic factors of the death event itself. Chapters four, five and six examined this through three thematic areas of transformation, injustice and grieving.

society and the honour of the nation, reflecting a need for both transcendence and security in equal measure. The sacred is that which is collectively experienced as absolute, and which creates normative claims over both the meaning and conduct of social life (Lynch, 2012b, p.29). So whilst the sacred is socially and culturally constructed, it does not operate in isolation. Sacralisation needs existing frames of reference if it is to take root and be widely interpreted as such, and hence we see such strong local influences in the two cases. Collective representations – or beliefs, in other words – arise from ritual, not the reverse. The sacralisation of the victim is performative, serving to establish both the grievability of the victim and the identity and boundaries of the ritual community. Establishing the victim as sacred also serves to define an oppositional and polluting evil, thereby establishing binary moral frames within which events operate. Furthermore, this sacralisation is representative of the liminal power of ritual to reassign meaning and reformulate social categories, moving away from established ritual specialists and again towards networked publics.

7.3.1.2 Symbolic imagery

Symbolic images are a central articulation of SMM on YouTube, and are inextricably linked with the sacralisation of the victim. Symbols act as mental heuristics: they are cognitive shortcuts that condense meaning into instantly recognisable form (O'Shaughnessy, 2004, p.101). In this way, they can serve to organise, focus and structure meaning.³ Appropriating the visual is a fundamental aspect of social media practices more widely, serving as a quick, easy way to articulate a position or emotion. As Collins (2004, p.37) observes, when an object (i.e. image) comes to embody a collective emotion, a new sacred object is born. Emotion isn't so much contained within these objects as it is a result

³O'Shaughnessy (2004, p.108) explores the idea that symbols are particularly attractive to those with less capacity for abstract thought, and are therefore particularly resonant amongst certain disadvantaged groups. I think this can give insight into the potency of symbols in the case of distant others, because it is not necessarily abstract thought that may be missing, but instead just a nuanced appreciation of events.

of their circulation, and the more symbols circulate, the more affective they become (Ahmed, 2004b, p.45). In SMM this connects a feeling of helplessness to a collective who share the experience, not in the sense of it becoming a common experience, but in terms of platform vernacular: a propagated, publicised, performed experience.

Symbolic imagery operates in a number of ways within SMM. As representation imagery, becomes a symbol of social injustice. This can be formulated as: representing the victim as traumatic death; representing the victim as a sacred form; documenting the event within a moral framework; documenting the aftermath of the event. As sacred objects, images operate as ritual mechanisms for focusing attention, building emotional energy, and creating a shared emotional experience. Finally, symbols are by no means just images: they are deployed linguistically in the comments and performed physically within the video frames.

7.3.1.3 Soundtracking

Soundtracking is the practice of selecting and deploying music and auditory resources in SMM. The use of song and poetry to express emotions, thoughts, and morals is a common response pattern in times of trauma, both personal and mediated. Song is an integral aspect of funeral rites across the world, and increasingly important in moments of mass mourning.⁴ The production, circulation and remediation of sound can be just as important as image. Music allows for a poetic representational response to trauma and loss, in what Feder calls ‘auditory symbolism’ (in Stein, 2004, p.791). As such, music and auditory tools are used in a wide variety of creative ways. Sometimes this is innovative and unique; often it can feel clichéd and formulaic. Sometimes they are highly located in local culture; often they appeal to universal heuristics. The use of famous and symbolic music can have a disproportionate impact on search

⁴For example, Stein (2004) has discussed the memorial concerts that followed 9/11.

and retrieval when referenced in the title or description, driving popularity and broadening exposure beyond the self-selected community of mourners. Music acts as a cognitive and emotional bridge between the events and emotions. Music, when used effectively, acts as an *amplifier of affect*.

7.3.1.4 Communicative presencing

SMM provides (You)Tubers the opportunity to insert themselves into events in a number of different ways and with different degrees of immersion: the production of video content; the shared viewing of videos; mechanical system responses such as up-voting, recommending and sharing; comments and replies; even response videos. Strategies for communicative presencing include: self-reference in locative signalling; first person presentation of response; system/architectural response (liking, sharing, etc.). In these communicative acts, the central function is to signify *presence* (to both the immediate group and the distant audience). Presencing is also temporal. SMM reconfigures sacred time, opening and extending the mourning period in a state of perpetuity. As Koster observes, ritual is the ‘symbolic demarcation of a territory in space and time. . . affecting the experience of identity of the participants away from individuality’ (2003, p.214). Communicative presencing alerts us to the conjunction of daily and mundane practices that are elevated in status through their deployment in SMM. Communicative presencing concerns the routine vernacular of online rituals within the specific context of public death events, and, as such, SMM conjoins the concepts of media practice with notions of ritual, identity and community.

7.3.1.5 Performance of grief

In SMM, grief is both performed and performative. That is to say, grief requires externalising, and in so doing grief acts to constitute that to which it refers. Intimately linked with communicative presencing, the performance of

grief is a more specified action within SMM. Grieving is a response to emotion and circumstance, so it should not be seen as a psychological state so much as a contextual set of social and cultural practices. Accordingly, the performance of grief always bears traces of past use, past context, past histories, and the bodies that have carried those emotions. The strategies of grief present in SMM are innovative, located, and highly specified. They include the deployment of the human body as a resource of grief, the construction of virtual shrines, the activation of international grief mnemonics, soundtracking, the giving of prayers and thanks, and the invocation of an imperative to remember. In the performance of grief, hate and anger are ritualised too, specifically in the representations of the perpetrators of violence and the articulation of the binary frames of good vs evil. Additionally, the performance of grief *personalises* trauma. Where mass media tend to frame events in terms of mass movements, organisations, crowds, and political ideologies, in SMM large social trauma can operate through small groups, friends, personal contexts, and interpersonal connections. As a result, victims can be cast as everyman and everywoman, personalising both ‘them’ and ‘us’. Communicative presencing and the performance of grief concerns the *emotional appropriation* of the meaning of events. Where media rituals frame the meaning of events and manage public emotions, SMM wrests the emotional mantel back and takes ownership of it.

7.3.1.6 The contestation of grievability

SMM is marked by the open contestation of the context and conditions of death, emphasising how the affordances of openness, interactivity and inclusivity mark SMM out against offline memorial practices. As a social process, SMM is unconventional, despite the transference of offline practices being so prevalent. It is a messy, bottom-up process that is at times chaotic, irrational and overtly emotional. SMM is also open-ended, and the continued presence of dispute illustrates how memorialisation is locked in a perpetual ‘state of becoming’, never

quite reconciled, and always open to the addition of new elements (Knudsen & Stage, 2012). Disagreement and dissent are a positive reflection of the role of digital media's ability to broaden debate, inclusion and political discourse in general. As such, the contestation of grievability is shown to be (at least potentially) a highly productive oppositional force that serves to maintain the internal legitimacy of each competing narrative (and associated collective body). That is to say, these arguments serve to authenticate and legitimise each other, and they increase the affective energy (and therefore temporal lifespan) of each. Disruptive narratives serve a very similar purpose as consensual ones: they define a trauma and provide solace for like-minded people. When a conspiracy is perceived, opposition is often reaffirming; even though the details of the death event are in dispute, the *presence of a social injustice* is not.

7.3.1.7 Moral communities

Like all ritual, SMM creates boundaries. Participation defines both inclusion and exclusion, which amplifies the emotional energy of a group. This is essential for maintaining momentum in SMM and, therefore, resources for defining inclusion are raised in status. In a tradition of thought that can be traced back to Durkheim, the boundaries of inclusion in SMM are based on the moral alignment the group. SMM is defined by its relationship to public death events, and therefore a social commentary on notions of justice is always present. Individual participants in SMM articulate their moral alignment with the group by presencing themselves in relation to the dead. Their actions are validated by the moral energy derived from the heightened emotional experience of ritual practice, and whilst we can observe common moral interpretations of events, it is vital to remember how diverse participants are: participation is often the only commonality between individuals. Thus, SMM is seen to be the source of the group's standards of morality, heightened by the intersubjective experience and emotional energy of the collective. It is this that generates the conception

of what is good, what is evil, and through what symbolic forms this will be articulated.

7.3.2 YouTube as ritual space: modalities and mechanisms for meaning-making

Research Question 2: *What are the platform-specific affordances and limitations for the operation of SMM on YouTube, and how does this add to the wider theorisation of ritual online?*

In the exploration of the architectural environment and the communicative practices taking place, the discussions of the previous chapters present us with the opportunity to account for YouTube as a space in which processes of ritualisation can flourish. As Bell describes, ‘ritualisation is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, more quotidian, activities’ (1992, p.74). This complements my preferred definition of ritual as ‘purposeful engagement with the sacred’ (Helland, 2013, p.27) because as action, ritualisation is the way in which the qualitative distinction between the sacred and profane is produced. That is to say, ritualisation is a way of acting that specifically produces privileged categories in culturally specific ways.

The research question must be qualified in respect to the findings being derived from YouTube only. In chapter three (subsection 3.4.2.3), I used a technique of network-mapping to show the system of choices informing the production and consumption of content on YouTube (see figure 3.1). This served two purposes. First, it showed the three distinct modes of communication most prevalent in this study, and the analytical frame and thematic analysis was developed accordingly. Second, it identified several points of significance that helped target

analysis and directly informed the development of theory.⁵ The following discussion constitutes a substantive and significant contribution to the theorisation of social ritual online, setting out the mechanisms and operational forces of ritual, and thereby illustrating in detail how the technosocial space of YouTube operates as ritual space.

7.3.2.1 Locative signalling

Locative signalling has a disproportionate role to play in defining the space as ritual space. With a relatively limited set of resources to draw from, locative signalling is vital in defining the terms in which the content is retrieved by users, the narrative framing of both events and the victim, and the emotional tone of the space. This combines to affect the norms of behaviour expected and observed BTL. The work of locative signalling happens hidden from the user, the on-screen details rarely engaging the user beyond the title.⁶ Locative signalling is, therefore, the first point at which the death event is mediated on the platform in terms of the users consuming content, and is vital to curation and retrieval. As linguistic objects, locative signalling act as *performatives* (as defined by Austin, 1962). That is to say, they are not truth-evaluable (they have no intrinsic truth value, nor are they supposed to) but instead they are doing (performing) some kind of social action. As such, locative signalling serves to set the emotional tone of the space, focusing the attention of those who are sharing the experience of watching the videos, and *performing the sacrality of the space*. Inclusive declaratives reiterate the shared experience of witnessing death and of marking it in the present space, validating the very act of *being there*. Titling texts

⁵Specifically, it highlighted how mechanical system responses have little impact and minimal complexity, whereas locative signalling has a disproportionately large effect on the way content is found and approached. It also showed how visual content is much more personalised and has much more scope and range for creative input than audio because it is composed of so many elements.

⁶YouTube videos each reside on their own page with a unique URL. YouTube creates HTML metatags for each video view and based on a different page elements (title, description, tags, up-votes, views, hyperlinks, etc.). Thus, search returns are affected by metatags just as much as simple keyword occurrence.

invite others into the space in an inclusive way that *emphasises commonality* over difference. The resources available to content producers is highly limited (semantically speaking), but they contain the affordances of visibility, proximity, popularity, association, search and retrieval. These affordances are realised through making content visible, locating events within a wider narrative frame, and presencing the author and the audience with the event and in relation to the victim.

7.3.2.2 Videos

YouTube is a video content sharing platform and videos clearly define the formulation of SMM therein. YouTube videos are not static objects waiting for our discovery, but rather aspects of a much wider dynamic process (Snowdon, 2014). SMM cannot be reduced to a single video, but is instead the wider phenomenon that these many thousands of videos reflect. Accordingly:

- *Videos function as 'boundary objects'*. They are artefacts, concepts or other reified forms that focus the attention of a group and cement the relations of a community (Wenger, 1999).
- *Videos focus attention*. Watching tribute videos is what binds the group. It is the primary, stylised, iterative action that defines inclusion in the ritual community, and their real power is in the way they focus attention and create a common emotional experience. As Durkheim argues, a shared attention to an action or object is how ritual participants 'become and feel themselves to be in unison...and makes them conscious of their moral unity' (1976, p.263).

7.3.2.3 Comment threads

The comment threads of YouTube are a place of interactivity, creativity and, ultimately, intersubjectivity. They contain two main classes of resource: 1) interpersonal, and 2) mechanical system responses. The first is limited only by the poetic articulation of the users: metaphor, comparison, oppositions, historical allegory, claims of conspiracy and expert knowledge, and even invocations of existential forces are observed as linguistic resources by which users make their arguments, share their feelings, and ultimately search for meaning in the traumatic aftermath of a public death event. The affordances of the comments threads serve to *sacralise the victim, perform grief* and *construct a moral story*. In doing so, perpetrators are framed, culpability is assigned, and solidarities are formed. Mechanical system responses are blunter tools. Simple up or down voting of the video or individual comments gives a sense of inclusion; direct responses go one stage further by creating a closeness between commenters when, that is, they are largely consensual and supportive. Disruptions are quickly closed down. Iterative, stylised, and highly specific utterances become normalised, performing the function of prayer or mantras in defining inclusion in the ritual community, focusing attention, and creating a shared emotional experience. Comment threads collapse the physical and conceptual space between (You)Tubers, creating a sense of locality, presence and proximity. The comments threads play a vital role in forming moral boundaries because of the collective and cumulative expression of sentiments.

7.3.3 SMM as a communion of grief: collective identity, control and absolution

Research Question 3: *How should we understand the forms of collective engagement observable in SMM, what are their characteristics, and how might this explain the motivation for participation?*

This thesis argues that SMM should be understood as constituting a *communion of grief*. I use the term communion in distinction from community for several key reasons. First, it distinguishes itself from notions of community as defined by areas of common living. Since Rheingold's (1991) seminal work on virtual communities, the groups that form online have been approached through all number of conceptual frames, but underlying them all is the idea of some form of social structure that binds people: a connection beyond circumstance that invokes a notion of belonging and shared identity. These are characteristics that are present in the groups formed during SMM, but I still find the label 'community' unsatisfactory. Papacharissi (2015) argues for the term 'affective publics' to describe emotionally defined online formations, but this is still too broad for what I am describing here. The communion of grief of SMM is an affective public, but it is particular, it is specific, and it warrants a better definition. Much like the 'public' referenced in the death event, the publics of SMM are not empirical entities, but rather symbolic orientations of cultural identity.

The term *communion* captures the intimate fellowship of SMM without implying a permanence or overstating the strength of those emotional bonds. It communicates the sharing and exchange of intimate thoughts and feelings – particularly those concerned with the mental and spiritual level – without the baggage of community. Most importantly of all, a communion of grief fits the rudimentary, unstructured and marginal *communitas* of Turner (1969). *Communitas* is a state of 'total communion' (Rapport & Overing, 2007, p.46), a mode of social relationship in which human beings revert to a primordial form of social bond. And *communitas* is a state of liminality. The liminality inherent to SMM carries both empowering and disempowering potential. Liminality is transitional but essential; it is the middle point, the inescapable process that separates the traumatic rupture of the death event from the eventual healing of social actors and the collective move towards emotional healing. A shocking

death changes things; a terrorist atrocity, a brutal murder, or a blameless victim brings forth questions about the safety, security, permanence and even viability of a society. Our ritualised responses are the very process of performing that change.

The major observations concerning the characteristics of this communion of grief are as follows:

Reward: Membership of the communion serves as the ‘reward’ for participants.

It validates our efforts, it is the vehicle for our emotions to feed others and be returned in kind. In short, it nourishes us in times of vulnerability. The reciprocity tells us ‘we are ok’, that our reactions make sense, that it is normal to be so affected as to seek solace and companionship online. The communion of grief is a statement of solidarity, comfort, release and support.

Absolution: Through coming together in a communion of grief, SMM serves to absolve us of responsibility for events. The creative production of SMM serves as a therapeutic demarcation of a terrible event. The communion of grief that it engenders allows us to face what is wrong with society from a position of strength. In defining the conditions of an event (and therefore the evil that is responsible for it), SMM confirms to us that this is not our fault. Like all the best communions, SMM cleanses and transforms. It is a form of absolution that shifts the question of blame firmly and decisively away from the collective and onto an external agent.

Control: The communion of grief acts as a reassertion of control. SMM may appear irrational, exaggerated, undignified or even hysterical at times. It might even be read as a loss of emotional control, but the truth is the opposite. SMM is a reassertion of control, a relocation of agency by those disempowered by events. It is a ‘moment out of time’ (Turner, 1982,

p.24). The difference is that these previous private, internalised emotional processes are now played out online, in public, collectively and in real time.

Instability: There is an intriguing paradox within the communion of grief whereby inasmuch there are powerful emotional bonds formed between participants, yet there is an inherent instability to those bonds. Once individual attention has shifted, once individuals have satiated whatever need they had to engage with the communion, these bonds are dropped and soon forgotten. This does not diminish the power of these connections, but it does reflect the spurious and often whimsical way we direct our emotional energies, and how easily we are seduced by the next event.

Social media are still media. They are a form of communication premised on representations, constructions and mediations where ‘true’ or original forms are rare indeed. But social media are an arena in which bonds are formed, not just between people but between ideas and emotions too. This affective feedback mechanism is central to understanding why individuals participate in SMM.

7.4 Summary of conclusions and contribution to the field

This thesis makes a contribution to a number of areas of enquiry, both practical and theoretical.

7.4.1 Appropriation, power and influence of the means of symbolic production

At its heart, this thesis is an examination of the shifting sands of where power resides in the network society. Death has the potential to be a political resource:

the ability to control the narratives around ‘our sacred dead’ has been a powerful source of political influence and control, to be drawn upon, manipulated and activated through the means of symbolic production and according to the agenda of those that have access to this resource. It is, no less, the ability to create meaning.

The major contribution of this thesis is a sustained commitment to theory building, namely in the development of a robust conceptual framework for SMM. The term SMM has appeared before (Gibbs et al., 2014; Haverinen, 2010; Walter et al., 2012) but it has never been formally defined. My theorising of SMM is offered as a way of capturing the fluid, collective and embedded practices that emerge online in response to public death events. Drawing from Butler (2004, 2009), Knudsen and Stage (2012) and Morse (2014), I have referred to this in terms of ‘grievability’. The primary conclusion of this thesis is that *the architecture of grievability has shifted online*, and as such the networked public is seen to *appropriate the mourning process of power of public mourning*. The conclusion drawn is that this represents a reconfiguration of the power to assign and define who or what may be ‘worthy’ in today’s world.

The digital media ecology of contemporary Western life results in an almost instantaneous remediation and veneration of the victim online. The online space offers very different resources and conditions for framing the dead, not least because access to the means of production is open and interactive. In this way, the discourses of public death that SMM formulate do not just record or represent historical events, but construct and constitute them. It is for this reason that the appropriation of public mourning is so significant, as SMM represents the ability of networks to undermine the entrenched power of hierarchies: a shift in control from the gatekeepers of old toward a networked public. This has profound implications for engagement with public life beyond the high-profile death event. These events are highly specified, and have been identified, analysed and critiqued as such. But in so doing, we are able to open the lid on much

wider processes taking place in today's world. These events are representative of not just a democratisation of public mourning, but of political engagement as a whole. We - as individuals, and as globally networked collectives - are all re-configured as active participants in the complex processes of discursive political power.

Enabled by our laptops and smartphones, each one of us is a potential contributor and saboteur of public life. At the time of writing, political discourse is dominated by the concept of 'Fake News'; the direct manipulation of political opinion and power by subversive digital engagements, and carried out by governments and civilian agents of all persuasions. At the same time, the death-cultish fundamentalist group ISIS continues to enlist recruits from across the globe via its online, open-source, contributory media activity. The insights garnered from this study can shed light on the specifics of both these phenomenon, as well as their wider implications for national and international public life.

7.4.2 Ritual theory, media and society

It is my argument that ritual serves as the missing element in the current literature examining mass-participation online events. It is ritual that illuminates the complex mix of motivations, actions, emotions, signs and symbols that constitute collective online memorialising. This thesis presents an extensive, robust and empirically based argument that shows ritual to be both a powerful cultural mechanism and an enlightening theoretical frame in the context of digital culture. I have developed and applied a very specific understanding of ritual, and it is only natural that many would interpret things differently, but I argue it will always be so with ritual. I legitimise my stance by referring the reader back to Edmund Leach's abiding observation that '[There is] the widest possible disagreement as to how the word ritual should be understood' (1968, p.526). Thus, I have made my case for approaching SMM as ritual, and I believe it is a strong one. Online ritual is defined by an absence or reconfiguring

of institutional rules, officiating and authoritative figures, strictures of time and place, prescribed actions, and the voice of tradition. This study is not alone in applying previously neglected thinking on ritual to the digital space, but it does carve out a new space and moves our thinking forward. In particular, it directly counters those who suggest the physical co-presence of human bodies is an essential ingredient for the ‘success’ of ritual (to use Collin’s (2004) own uncomfortable term). SMM is profoundly different to many traditional rites performed in places of worship, but ritual it remains. Ritual is validated by participation, and it is clear that for many people taking part in SMM provides a positive emotional response. Questions of authenticity or legitimacy are both unhelpful and flawed. This study helps to make the case for ritual studies to exist within some of the fastest moving areas of society. Furthermore, the twin ritual concepts of the sacred and the profane remain enlightening tools for understanding the extreme divisions we see online that feed back and forth from wider society.

The point at which ritual and media theory converge is a truly rich area for understanding the contemporary world. It was a surprise to me that the project as finally written was so closely connected to media events theory. It was a long held conviction that SMM represented something quite different to the enduring observations made by Dayan and Katz over 25 years ago; how could it not, I thought. Instead I was pleased to realise that SMM is a difference in *degree*, not in *kind*, and that this research builds on their enduring insights (and particularly the evolution of specific terminology), whilst moving media events theory onward. SMM is a form of networked sociality, illustrating the power of horizontal communication structures to undermine vertical ones. The alterations to structures of power and control that we observed in terms of the media and political complex are just as applicable to the structures and functions of ritual. As such, we can extrapolate quite confidently that these types of dynamic changes are occurring in other religio-cultural social fields, and it

is significant that this thesis moves between discussions of Durkheim's philosophy of religion and Berry's philosophy of code, and between anthropological methodologies and Big Data analytics.

A major contribution of this thesis is in the crafting of a new heuristic vocabulary for SMM (and online ritual more widely), which adds a much needed specificity to this type of critical engagement. These rituals are *public*, *mediated*, *interactive*, and *open-ended*. In presenting such a detailed, theory-driven account of online mourning rituals, this thesis has shown how digital architecture and innovative, often subversive and/or disruptive user behaviour produces a platform-specific vernacular of ritual. For example, the thesis has shown how the soundtracking of grief acts as an amplifier of affect; the bias of visual content outweighs the impact of language, has identified hierarchical structures grief constituted and enacted in a conjunction of human and computational agents. So we see how ritual does much more than sharpen a sense of solidarity: ritual creates narratives that are based on intensely felt moral definitions of the self and of the collective. As Durkheim first discussed, social rituals create a sense that you are part of something bigger than you could be on your own; that you are a dynamic part of *history in-the-making*; that your moral intuition is the right one and is shared by a collective body to which you truly belong. Thus, the contributions this thesis makes to ritual theory are highly pertinent to other areas, particularly in respect of what might be termed New Social Movement-type phenomena: single issue pressure groups (animal rights, climate change, Black Live Matter); political movements that operate outside of established party structures (Momentum, Podesta, Britain First); and violent extremist groups (ISIS, EDL, the Alt-Right). The online space provides a platform for marginal, disempowered or indecent views to be heard; ritual gives them life, identity, iconography and helps establish a social body.

7.4.3 Methodology: YouTube as multimodal assemblage

This research presents a novel and innovative methodological approach that itself constitutes a contribution to the field. Developing the methodology in response to both data and theory, it was always apparent to me that my approach did not sit entirely within one tradition or another. Terminology is important, but labels can be restrictive, and so it was something of a compromise to eventually define my research design as a media anthropology that employs mixed-methods. After all, the term itself was originally used to bridge the qualitative/quantitative divide, and I hope that we have moved far beyond that point now. My particular way of ‘mixing’ is not the traditional triangulation technique whereby the application of one method is used to verify the results of another. Rather, this is a ‘value-added’ design, in which each element adds another layer of complexity, thereby incrementally building up meaning and understanding.

It has been my aim throughout to show the power of combining methods in direct response to the research endeavour at hand - in terms of subject and object study - and do so through solid empirical evidence. This has resulted in a number of research outputs not directly linked to the research questions *per se*. In the first instance, the system-network map of YouTube presented here can be applied and adapted for any study of the platform that is interested in user behaviour. It acts as a ‘first sift’ in identifying the resources available to actors, their functionality, meaning potential, and their implications for consequent behaviours of content production, consumption, and user interaction. This approach allows for the parallel and synchronous analysis and discussion of the whole range of communicative resources at play, whilst filtering out those not centrally relevant to the research question at hand, and has the potential for application across a number of research endeavours.⁷ Second, in presenting

⁷A more detailed explanation of the contribution made by this methodology is found in chapter three (section 3.4).

a platform-specific MDA with a comprehensive cataloguing of modes, resources and affordances is both a tool for further studies of YouTube and a transferable framework for other platforms, and applicable to a whole tranche of user behaviours.

It remains true that the interdisciplinary nature of new media research means it has benefitted greatly from the exchange and interaction between differing epistemologies and methodologies, and the mixed-methods approach employed here continues in this tradition by ‘following the medium’. This work is part of an evolving trajectory to which some make take issue and others will surely add and refine, but this is the nature of pushing work forwards. I have always been sceptical of imposed boundaries, and as such I see points at which traditions meet as productive opportunities rather than points of conflict. It is certainly my hope that the methodology developed in the course of this study proves a useful tool for other researchers in a very practical sense. I also hope that it serves simply as encouragement for others to test new ground, and to foster a closer engagement between social and computer scientist in some form: we can always learn something from each other.

7.5 Parameters, limitations and further work

Considering the range of issues that SMM involves and the number of ways that it might have been approached, it is important to acknowledge what this thesis is not. Whilst public memorialisation is about the construction of collective memory, this is not strictly speaking a study of *memory-making*. The power of iconic imagery and its role in mnemonic memory is significant and worthy of further investigation, and indeed this study has shown how this process now begins in the minutes and hours after an event. However, memory-making is distinct from memorialisation, and to try to reconcile both here would have simply led to a confusion. Neither is this a study in citizen journalism and the

impact of digital media on traditional media institutions. Again, the events described within these pages are intimately bound with these questions, but to follow this path would have clouded an already complex research endeavour. Finally, it is not a study of audiences. Issues of media in combination with witnessing (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009), grievability (Butler 2004; 2009) and death (Chouliaraki, 2006; Morse, 2016; Sumiala, 2014b) have all been discussed and serve to ground this work, but they all remain located in terms of audience and the consumption of media. SNS are defined through the active participation of users in creating social connections and digital content, and so, for a research endeavour such as this, to frame (You)Tubers as audiences would have been inappropriate.

This research has detailed a number of significant contributions to our understanding of mass-participation online events, but it is also of paramount importance to acknowledge the limitations brought about through the research design and conceptual paradigm. The first of these is the cost of limiting the study to a single online platform. The focus on YouTube has allowed a full, rich and robust account of the platform, yet SMM is in no way restricted to YouTube, and YouTube is in no way representative of all SNS. Furthermore, both cases have incidences of SMM that occurred across a number of platforms with particular vernaculars of their own. The decisions not to include Lee Rigby's Facebook page and the IAmNeda.org site were important yet difficult, and their exclusion should not be read as a mark of insignificance. The notion of platform vernacular is premised on the observation of *difference across platforms*, and this research would only be enhanced through further case studies, both in terms of an account of more death events, but more significantly – I believe – across different SNS. Because of these restrictions, a challenge of this research was to strike the balance between drawing conclusions from the evidence and acknowledging caveats within it. Nothing exists in isolation, and with questions of media and culture this is particularly so.

The second potential limitation is the restriction of the study to just two cases, since it could be argued that this limits the generalisability of findings. However, whilst the study has a population of just two cases (in terms of public death events), it has considered over 130 examples of mourning videos, each representing a separate ‘incidence’ of online ritual, gathering over 7,550 comments with almost 4.5 million views by the summer of 2015. Furthermore, these examples were drawn as representative from an original corpus of 2,417 unique memorial videos between the two cases. So these are mass-participation events and the observations made from them do not need to be limited by the cases under consideration here. In chapter three I discussed at length the implications of the comparative case study design, and it is worth restating that the significance of results is not only found in the generalisability of findings, but also in the way that a case is emblematic of a wider body of phenomenon. The characteristics of SMM are shared across a number of mass-participation events, and whilst I have been careful to draw out illustrative examples without suggesting any single one is in itself representative of the whole, the insights garnered here – particularly in respect to ritual and the online space – contain much that can be transferred.

If the insights into public death, ritual and memorialisation are to be fully explored, future research would do well to approach a wider range of death events. I was explicit in defining public death events in distinction from celebrity deaths (section 2.2), yet having now accomplished my goal of theorising SMM, a consideration of celebrity death events would add another element to the wider theory. Similarly, an account of mass-death events might bring new insights, because the cases included in this study concern specific people that can be clearly personalised. What about mass-death events, where the ‘object’ under attack is abstracted to the level of a location or social group, such as Paris, migrants, or the LGBT community? How might this impact the types of memorial practices that result, and how in turn might this affect the type and strength of moral

bonds that form online? A major obstacle to maintaining these bonds is the emotional energy required to sustain an emotional investment. Does the inclusion of more but depersonalised bodies add or remove from this? Do attacks on minority groups engender weaker or stronger emotional responses from an ‘external’ audience? There are many lines of enquiry to pursue.

The third limitation of the study concerns the imposition of false boundaries. As discussed in chapter two, media events are traceable to an origin, but they are boundary-less until we impose a research agenda in some form. First, this is a question of time. As illustrated in the empirical chapters, social media open these events out into an endless and open state. Every one of the videos included in this thesis remains hosted on YouTube at the point of writing. The comment threads continue to evolve, and patterns of interaction spike around anniversaries and related news events. The meta-data concerning viewing figures, up-votes and shares was outdated almost from the moment it was accessed. This does not invalidate it in any way, but it is a stark reminder of how fluid events are and how open social media remain. Another false boundary concerned the decision to limit Neda’s data largely to the English language. I addressed this in detail previously (3.3.1), but without collaboration and more resources (particularly of time) it simply was not feasible to include videos named and tagged exclusively in Farsi.⁸ Whilst this does not undermine the findings *per se*, it is certain that the inclusion of this data could have influenced results for the better.

Another false boundary is found between types of media. These events cannot be reduced to questions of ‘new vs old’ media, ‘digital vs analogue’, nor ‘offline vs online’. This is about changes to every aspect of our media environment. The last decade has seen a move from a few dominant television stations to thousands of cable and satellite channels available at any one time, web access available on mobile devices almost anywhere, the digitisation of newspapers and radios, the explosion of online content in both top-down and horizontal delivery networks,

⁸Not forgetting that any number of other languages were removed from the video comment corpus.

all interlinked with SNS that are now equally about content distribution as interpersonal communication. But the practicalities of doing research means that boundaries must be imposed. Case studies must be defined. Not every promising lead can be followed across the web through endless clicks of the mouse. Thus, it has not been possible to explore how embedded links might drive up viewing figures on memorial videos, or how widely videos were shared across different platforms. The comment activity on YouTube could not be compared to similar threads below Facebook hosted content.

Even with all the rationale for limiting the study to one platform, the body and range of data was still on an immense scale. I was convinced that for a full picture to be drawn I needed to take account of as many of the social and architectural aspects of the platform as possible. Yet this throws up problematic data requiring different modes of analysis. At times, I wished I had just been looking at videos in isolation, or at comment threads alone. The level of detail required to adequately account for all the dynamics observable within each was impractical for inclusion and would have resulted in a cumbersome, unwieldy study. So just as much data and analysis that is included herein has been left out. I hope that I have found the right balance between detail and illustrative examples so that the story is told with both clarity and conviction.

The final limitation of the study concerns time and the incredible rate of change that defines digital culture in general. At the point I began this research events in Iran were two years old. The ‘Arab Spring’,⁹ with all its hope and hyperbole – particularly around the role of technology – was still in its infancy. I began looking at different case studies which appeared with heartbreaking regularity: the Japanese journalist Kenji Goto, the bus rape victim Jyoti Pandey, for example. This project had already begun when Lee Rigby was murdered. I had no idea at the time that he would have such a profound impact upon it, and

⁹I use the term in inverted commas for good reason, as it represents a certain hopeful narrative of events that has since been tempered. The more common ‘Arab Uprisings’ is the preferred term.

already the fourth anniversary of his death has passed.

The impact of time means that new platforms appear and others shift in relevance. In practice, different platforms have different roles for different people at different times, perhaps even when they are standing side-by-side witnessing the same momentous event. YouTube remains a media behemoth. The scale of content uploaded and consumed is staggering. But this must be understood in relative terms, because *all* digital media use continues to grow. At the same time new platforms have appeared such as Vine (launched June 2012, now with 200 million users), SnapChat (2011, 160 million users) Instagram (2010, 700 million users in 2017), and it is easy to forget it was only in 2012 that Twitter started hosting videos directly. And now we have deaths being live-streamed via Facebook. The digital landscape moves quickly, and research must do the same if it is to stay relevant.

7.6 Final thoughts

During the long process of writing this thesis there were times I thought that it had become so niche as to have lost much relevance to the real world, to the big issues of our day. I was lost in endless data, sifting through streams of online chatter, and becoming conditioned into numbness at the replay of horrific scenes as I tagged and coded images of bloodied bodies. When you are this close, it becomes quite easy for these individual utterances and images to appear mundane. At such times, the ultimate question for the social researcher – the unforgiving ‘*so what?*’ – became difficult to answer. But through the course of writing, with the minutiae linking back to the much bigger, more challenging issues, my belief in the importance and relevance of this work was renewed. It is easy to dismiss social media as banal if we are lazy in our thinking, and we are all guilty of that at times in life. Yet this is surely because we are all equally guilty of spending precious moments of escapisms in our social feeds,

news updates, messaging apps, health monitors and whatever other personalised distractions we have built around ourselves. The inescapable truth is that at times of crisis, trauma, social or personal upheaval, social media represent quite simply the largest, most accessible, most far-reaching communicative resource we have ever known. Yes, social media propagate hyperbole, rumour and shallow commercialism, but fundamentally they represent a connection between people, places and ideas in powerful and exciting ways that continue to surprise, impress and shock. This thesis has explored one highly specified example of this, but the findings contained within have resonance far beyond.

Appendix A

Glossary of terms

Affordance The concept of affordances is central to multimodality, and captures the opportunities that modal resources represent. Affordances reflect the specific features and properties of an artefact, from SNS platforms and technology, through to locations, things, people and places. Affordances carry expectations of use, but these will be adapted according to user needs (Hutchby, 2001, in Lievrouw, 2014, p.23). In multimodality, affordances is an often contested term, with van Leeuwen (2005) understanding it to reflect the *meaning-potential* of a mode, whereas Kress (1993) uses it to convey that which it is *possible to represent* in a given mode. Jewitt (2009) argues that the meaning potential of a mode is shaped by the given context, and it is this more nuanced understanding that I deploy here. Affordances go hand-in-glove with the notion of limitations: how the social, cultural or technical context limits the potential for expressing meaning in some form or another.

Disruptive Media Events The term ‘disruptive media events’ derives from Katz and Liebes (2007), in distinction from the ceremonial and largely integrative news events of media events theory (Dayan and Katz, 1992). As such, I use the terms *integrative* and *disruptive* media events throughout. A key characteristic of the disruptive media event is the incorporation of social media and User Generate Content into the wider media event as imagined by Dayan and Katz.

Grievability The notion of grievability understands that the establishment and maintenance of death as ‘worthy’ of public grief requires cultural work. For a death to be grievable it must be established as extraordinary and set apart from the thousands of other deaths occurring every day. Judith Butler’s (2004) coining of the term presents a complex moral philosophy that draws particularly on Boltanski’s politics of pity, and as such is particularly concerned with mass media and the framing of lives/deaths, in particular ways. Whilst I do not suggest it possible to adopt such a powerful term without an awareness of its conceptual origins, it is possible to use it more openly without compromising it.

Liminality derives from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold. Largely attributable to Turner (1969) via Van Gennep (1960) and now considered by to be a master concept in the social and political sciences (Thomassen, 2009), liminality is the middle state of ritual where normal classifiers and positions are ambiguous, indeterminate, and open for reassignment. Van Gennep defines rites of passage as '[those] which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age' (van Gennep, 1909, quoted in Turner, 1969, p.94), in which he identifies three stages (see section 2.5.1). Thus, the public death event is understood as a moment of anti-structure in which conventional structures are suspended and challenged (at least potentially). In the anti-structure of liminality, a new social relationship forms that is an 'unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals' (1969, p.96). Experiences of liminality can be related to individuals, social groups and whole societies. The temporal dimensions of liminality can relate to fleeting moments, periods (days, weeks or months) and even epochs. Finally, the spatial dimensions can relate to specific places, areas, or even large regions (Thomassen, 2009).

Mode In its most basic presentation, a mode is 'a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for meaning making' (Kress, 2009, p.79). A mode of communication is made up of various resources available, and with a syntax and grammar specific to that mode (Kress 2014, pp.54-56). A mode has representational, communicative and performative resources that hold different affordances, which might be realised in a number of ways. Formally, the theory of multimodality has a series of requirements for defining what may or may not be a 'mode': the textual, ideational and interpersonal functions. Kress (2009, p.88) sets out three 'tests' when defining a 'mode':

- Can X form internally coherent message entities? (Textual function)
- Can X represent meanings about social relations about those involved? (Interpersonal function)
- Can X represent meanings about states, actions, and events? (Ideational function)

There is debate about how wide a term 'mode' can be, and certainly my definition of the three modes of YouTube (Locative Signalling, Video and Comments) is not beyond challenge (it might well be argued they are 'modal assemblages', for example). However, what is most important is that when undertaking empirical work we are explicit in where, how and why we are drawing boundaries between modes so as to retain the analytical weight of the term, as set out in section 3.2.2.3.

Multimodality Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001, p.20) define multimodality as 'the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event'. Multimodality is premised on the understanding that all modes of communication are constituted by a finite number of semiotic resources.

In the context of SNS, it is argued that the unique combination of architecture, grammars, and logics that make up the affordances and limitations to each constitute a ‘platform vernacular’ that requires an adapted multimodal consideration of each. Multimodality is therefore not a theory of explanation but rather a domain of enquiry. Multimodality has three major branches of thought: social semiotics, interactional analysis, and discourse analysis (Jewitt, 2009, pp.28-39), and it is the last of these that this study follows most closely.

Performativity is a term taken from sociolinguistics, and refers to the ways in which the signifier – an utterance, image, or action – works in generating and informing that to which it refers.

Platform Vernacular references how certain communicative practices emerge and take root within a particular SNS (Gibbs et al., 2015). Whilst the technical affordances of different platforms are often startlingly close, each comes to develop its own combination of styles, forms and internal norms that often subvert design decisions or are a response to the limitations or deficiencies of a particular platform. The hashtag (#) on Twitter is a perfect example: it grew out of the user community and was adopted to signpost conversation threads and signify inclusion within a discursive event, rather than being a ‘designed’ feature of the platform. These styles are seen as platform-specific ‘vernaculars’ to reflect the sense that they are ‘of the people’ (ibid., p.257).

Presencing is a term formally introduced by Nick Couldry (2012, pp.49-51) and refers to maintaining an online presence for others to encounter. I see presencing as reflecting how individuals use their native vernacular to define and locate their experiences amongst a wider network of connections – both known and unknown – in a way that is both natural and meaningful to them. This moves beyond presencing as the simple maintenance of a profile and instead to the function of positioning oneself in relation to others and/or events. As such, questions of presencing are intimately bound with those of the platform vernacular.

Public Death Event A public death event concerns those deaths that are considered exceptional, unnatural, unjust and therefore morally significant. This inherent injustice defines them as ‘worthy’ of public mourning and grief, and as such they sit in distinction from the mundane nature of the celebrity death event. Furthermore, the celebrity is celebrated for what they achieved in life, whereas a public death event is defined by what the individual represents in death. These events are experienced primarily through the media and cannot be understood outside a ‘media events’ frame. They are entangled with and inseparable from technological processes of mediation and are further characterised by strong visual, affective and dramatic elements.

Realisation When a communicative resource is put to use, it can be understood as a realisation of its potential. The basic observation is that separate communicative modes such as language, pictures or gesture have their own particular means of expressing meaning, yet these expressions are often articulating very similar semantic relations. As such, I employ

the broad term ‘realisations’ to allow for the simultaneous consideration of different modal forms. In essence then, the term reflects the expression of meaning through the deployment of a mode of (or in combination with) communication.

Resource Within multimodality, resources refer to the actions, materials and artefacts we draw upon when communicating (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p.285). Resources are the connections between representational forms (visual, linguistic or cognitive) and what people then actually do with them in a practical, lived sense. People undergo a perpetual process of choice-making when deciding which communicative resources to draw from and how to deploy them, yet this is a contextually formed and socially regulated system, both in terms of what resources might be available at any one time, and the types of sociocultural forces that will influence their use and interpretation (Jewitt, 2009b, p.23).

Sacred I am employing a particular use of ‘the sacred’ here, one that is most closely associated with Gordon Lynch (2012a, 2012b). Sacredness should be understood in terms of perceived absolutes on which meanings of social realities are based, and is therefore a form of social categorisation that is based on a moral orientation rather than any objective rationality. The sacred manifests in certain forms and in response to social contingencies. Sacred forms are constituted through a combination of symbols, discourses, sentiments and social practices that recursively reconstitute that sacrality in time, space, and through the people that coalesce around them. Finally, sacred forms carry a normative reality that simultaneously constructs its opposite (and ultimately polluting) profanity. Because of the moral basis of sacred forms, their pollution becomes a question of social and/or moral injustice.

Social Media Memorialising (SMM) The central conceptual term in the thesis, with links to every term in the glossary. SMM is a performative and commemorative media phenomenon that occurs in response to public death events. Participation is self-motivated but equally collective and interactive. It is marked by open participation structures, sociopolitical contingency, fluidity, and the centrality of User Generated Content. SMM is an emotional response to a traumatic death event, and an active commentary on the conditions of that death.

Social Network Site (SNS) Social Network Sites are now a feature of everyday life for the majority of the planet, but it is still important to distinguish them from other online platforms. I refer to the key text by Boyd & Ellison that defines SNS as those web-based services that ‘allow users to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made within the system’ (2007, p.211). This description is strengthened when taken alongside Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), who locate SNS as a type of social media, which is defined as that which allows the creation and exchange of UGC (see below).

Social Injustice is used in the context of a moral corruption of what is held to be right and wrong (i.e., the opposite of justice), in distinction from the field of enquiry concerned with equality, the distribution of wealth, equal opportunity, privilege, etc. Ideas of social injustice are intimately bound with those of sacredness. Social injustice inevitably reflects collective sentiments, and this thesis explores how networked media reconfigure traditionally defined groups (nation, ethnic, religious, etc.) towards interpersonal ties, and to the ‘personal communities’ that are chosen and defined by individuals, not ascribed to them (Rapport & Overing, 2007, p.187). It is exactly this type of self-selection and identity that is central to our thinking about online communities, where emotional and moral attachments take precedence over ‘membership’. This allows alignments between individuals who share notions of social justice – individual rights, civic freedoms, etc., – but might otherwise have been separated by cultural prejudices, social statuses, etc. This is crucial as it serves to distinguish legitimate and illegitimate lives. The state of suffering is contingent on what is ‘wrong’; a social injustice involves an emotional suffering about conceptual wrong.

User Generated Content (UGC) In many ways, UGC captures all of the ways in which individuals make use of social media. For the term to apply, UGC has three essential aspects: (1) it must be published online, either on a publicly accessible site or on an SNS and be accessible to a self-selected group; (2) it should reflect some form of creative engagement; and (3) it must not be a product of professional routines or practices (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These distinctions are important. They serve to exclude emails or instant messages and the re-posting of existing content without modification, and most significantly locate UGC outside the commercial realm. UGC is now conceptually and practically linked with questions of hardware and connectivity. In particular, the convergence of technologies in mobile devices such as smartphones and laptops means that UGC can now be produced almost anywhere and at anytime with an ever increasing ease and production quality.

(You)Tuber is preferred to ‘user’ when referring to the participants in video-interaction, assuming that, in so doing, they actively contribute to YouTube existence, rather than merely using it. In the video thread, participants never refer to themselves as ‘users’; especially when greeting each other, they define themselves in relation to the activity of ‘(you)tubing’, either with ‘tuber’ or ‘youtuber’ (with alternative spelling forms and capitalisation practices, e.g. utuber, ytuber, you-tuber). The use of the main verb in the video-thread topic (‘to (you)tube’) also varies; most videos analyse it morphologically (e.g. I tube from), while some use it unanalysed (e.g. I Youtube) (Adami, 2009). To comply with this variation in use, the bracketed form ‘(You)Tuber’ is adopted here.

Appendix B

Chronology of events: Neda Agha-Soltan

12-Jun-09	<p>Iranian presidential elections.</p> <p>In tense circumstances, news was released that indicated the incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won a clear majority. Protests against the result began that evening, with large gatherings of opposition supporters gathering in public spaces across Iran.</p>
13-Jun-09	<p>Official results are announced by the Islamic republic News Agency, Iran's official news outlet, reporting Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the victor with 62% of the votes cast. His rival Mir-Hossien Mousavi received 34%. The other reformist candidate Mehdi Karroubi won just 2% of votes.</p> <p>Candidates Mohsen Rezaee and Mir-Hossein Mousavi lodge official complaints with the Guardian Council of Iran against the results.</p> <p>Protests gather pace. They are largely peaceful and without major incident. However, the news is perceived as deeply damaging to Iran's international reputation.</p> <p>The Iranian internet is shut down completely for 45 minutes due to suspected DDoS attacks from protesters.</p>
14-Jun-09	<p>The pro-Ahmadinejad Basij paramilitary group raided Tehran University with scenes of extreme violence between students and Basij, resulting in many injured and over 200 reported arrests.</p> <p>Protests are reported outside Iranian embassies across the world, including Paris, Berlin, London, Rome, Vienna, Ankara and Dubai.</p> <p>The Iranian government begins a relentless round of arrests, including political figures, academics, media figures and students.</p>
15-Jun-09	<p>A reported one million people join an anti-Ahmadinejad march down Azadi Street in Tehran. Mousavi makes his first public appearance since the elections.</p> <p>Election discrepancies continue to become clear, with the two conservative provinces of Yazd and Mazandaran reporting a turnout in excess of 100%. Competing rallies are organised by pro-regime and opposition supporters, and outbreaks of serious violence are reported.</p>

16-Jun-09	<p>The Guardian Council announces a partial recount which is received as another attempt to placate the protesters, with no expectation of fraud being discovered. During a rally in Azadi Square, militia opened fire on the crowd killing at least thirteen and injuring many more.</p> <p>The protests continue to increase, and the symbolic adoption of green by the opposition supporters becomes widespread.</p> <p>The Ministry of Culture issues an edict banning all foreign media from leaving their offices.</p>
17-Jun-09	<p>Iranian footballers wear green wristbands during a game in South Korea, increasing international attention.</p> <p>Over half a million protesters are reported to have marched from Haft-e-Tir Square to Valiasr Square.</p>
19-Jun-09	<p>Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared the victory of Ahmadinejad as a 'divine assessment' and that continued protests would not be tolerated by the state. The threat of violence was explicit.</p>
20-Jun-09	<p>Markedly fewer protesters took part in marches, estimated in their tens of thousands, down from hundreds of thousands at previous rallies.</p> <p>The Ministry of Culture bans foreign media from reporting from Iran, and bans entry of any further media personnel.</p>
18.00	<p>Neda Agha-Soltan, a student of modern philosophy at Tehran University, was in a crowd of protesters on Kargar Avenue with her music teacher Hamid Panahi. She was shot in the chest, collapsing immediately and dying soon after. Her death was recorded on at least three cameraphones.</p> <p>Within hours, one of those videos was uploaded to YouTube by Arash Hejazi, a novelist and publisher who was standing next to Neda when she was shot and is seen in the videos trying to administer first aid.</p>
21-Jun-09	<p>The YouTube video goes viral, and is picked up by news agencies across the globe. Neda is headline news internationally.</p> <p>The hashtag #Neda begins to trend on Twitter.</p> <p>The Facebook page 'Neda Agha-Soltan' is set up in memory. Many more follow over the coming weeks.</p> <p>The first memorial video appears on YouTube, titled 'Requiem For Neda' and posted by Tooraj Bakhtiari, who explained in his description: 'I dedicate my song to Neda and my beloved countrymen are being killed by the Iranian government's henchmen. The world should stand united against this brutal regime. Let us all remember Neda and the rest of the people who are killed by these thugs.'</p>
22-Jun-09	<p>NedaNet.org is set up by a network of global activists, providing routing services to allow Iranians to bypass internal security and blocked platforms.</p> <p>Presidential candidates Mousavi and Karoubi called for Iranians to commemorate Neda Soltan, with Karoubi announcing a demonstration at 4pm via his Facebook page.</p> <p>The Iranian government issues a ban on collective prayers in mosques for Neda Soltan.</p> <p>At least fifty videos dedicated to Neda have appeared on YouTube, whilst news items telling the story reached many hundreds. Titles explicitly locate Neda as a martyr and hero, such as 'In Memory of Neda Soltan and other Martyrs of Freedom in Iran', 'R.I.P. Neda & all other Iranian martyrs - k1shah', and 'Neda - Hero of Iran - we will never forget you !'</p>

	General Ali Fazli, Commander of the Revolutionary Guards, is arrested for refusing to use force on student protesters.
23-Jun-09	Neda Soltan is buried at the Behesht-e Zahrā cemetery in Southern Tehran. A proper funeral was denied by the authorities. The family attended services with around 70 mourners at the Niloufar mosque in Abas Abad, near the family home. Paramilitary forces arrived and broke up the mourners. The Shia cycle of mourning (3, 7 and 40 days) results in government authorities visiting Neda's home and removing all symbols of mourning from the house and preventing pilgrims from gathering. Reports begin to circulate of neighbours being forced from their homes, and streets being cleared nearby as state actors fear the symbolism and potency of Neda. Reports emerge that Neda Soltan's immediate family are threatened with violence if they permit any public gathering to mark Neda's death. The <i>New York Times</i> runs an editorial declaring Neda the 'most widely witnessed death in human history'. Neda is widely referred to as a martyr in Iranian commentary and increasingly in international discourses too. #Neda and #IranElection continue to be highly prominent on Twitter. Memorial videos have reached many hundreds.
29-Jun-09	The Guardian Council ratify the election results, confirming there will be no re-run, and sparking heavy protests.
04-Jul-09	The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting claims in a televised address that the videos of Neda's death were produced by the BBC and CNN.
20-Jul-09	Nedaspeaks.org is set up as a curated selection of self-portraits in which individuals hold banners and placards with the declarative mantra 'I am Neda' (no hashtag).
25-Jul-09	United for Iran protest march takes place in Paris, with an estimated 8,000 people. They unveiled a two-kilometre long banner of solidarity.
30-Jul-09	The fortieth day of mourning (highly significant in Shia traditions) of Neda's death is marked by large protests. #8mordad (the date on the Iranian calendar) trends on Twitter.
05-Aug-09	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is sworn in as President of Iran in Tehran. Protests were held, but on a smaller scale.
16-Nov-09	Supporters of the Iranian regime desecrated Neda's grave and removed the headstone.
11-Dec-09	Iranian state television airs a news story claiming Neda's death was faked as part of a Western plot.

Appendix C

Chronology of events: Lee Rigby

22 -May-13	British army soldier Lee Rigby killed whilst returning home from the Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich, South East London.
14.20	<p>Rigby was attacked by Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale. The two men drove their car into Rigby as he crossed the street, then attacked him with knives and a cleaver and he died in the street. The men then attempted to decapitate the body.</p> <p>The attack took place on a busy street, and there were many witnesses. The aftermath was filmed by at least four individuals with their cameraphones. In the moments after the attack, the men appear not to be sure of what to do next. They pace back and forth as several people approach the still body of Rigby.</p> <p>Ingrid Layou-Kennet was getting down from a bus when she saw what she assumed to be a road accident. She approached the scene intending to give first aid, but on seeing the victim was dead she engaged the attackers in conversation.</p> <p>One of the attackers, Adebolajo, then approaches a man with a cameraphone and begins a diatribe toward the camera:</p>

- ‘The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers. And this British soldier is one; it is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. By Allah, we swear by the almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you until you leave us alone. So what if we want to live by the Sharia in Muslim lands? Why does that mean you must follow us and chase us and call us extremists and kill us? Rather you lot are extreme, you are the ones, when you drop a bomb do you think it hits one person? Or rather your bomb wipes out a whole family? This is the reality. By the way, if I saw your mother today with a buggy I would help her up the stairs, this is my nature. But we are forced by the Qur’an, through the [unclear] through many passages in the Qur’an we are told that we must fight them as they fight us, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. I apologise that women had to witness this today but in our lands women have to see the same. You people will never be safe. Remove your governments, they don’t care about you. You think David Cameron is gonna get caught in the street when we start busting our guns? Do you think politicians are going to die? No, it’s going to be the average guy, like you and your children. So get rid of them. Tell them to bring our troops back so you can, so we can all live in peace; leave our lands and you will live in peace. That is all I have to say. I mean, Allah is peace, I bless you, Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem, As-Salamu-Alaykum’.
- Adebolajo then handed a member of the public a handwritten, two-page document.
- 14.34 Armed police arrived at the scene.
- The men ran at the police, one holding a handgun, the other a knife, and were shot and wounded. Both men were arrested and taken to hospital. Footage of the arrest of the men was filmed on at least two mobile phones (one at street level, one from an adjacent building). These were quickly acquired by news media and posted online.
- The video footage of Adebolajo justifying the killings was obtained by *The Sun* newspaper and ITN news. The footage was aired on the 6.30pm and 10.00pm news bulletins, and posted on the ITN and *The Sun* websites. The ITN website crashed within half an hour due to the level of traffic viewing the video.
- The BBC news showed some edited sections of the footage on their evenings news programmes, whereas Sky News decided to refrain from showing the video on the grounds that it was too disturbing (despite being part of the Sky News Media Group, to which *The Sun* also belongs).
- 23-May-13 David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, makes a public statement on the attack, saying, ‘This was not just an attack on Britain – and on the British way of life. It was also a betrayal of Islam and of the Muslim communities who give so much to our country. There is nothing in Islam that justifies this truly dreadful act. We will defeat violent extremism by standing together, by backing our police and security services and above all by challenging the poisonous narrative of extremism on which this violence feeds.’
- President Barack Obama condemns the attacks.
- Benjamin Flatters, 22, of Lincoln, was arrested after anti-Islamic Facebook comments and charged with offences of malicious communications.

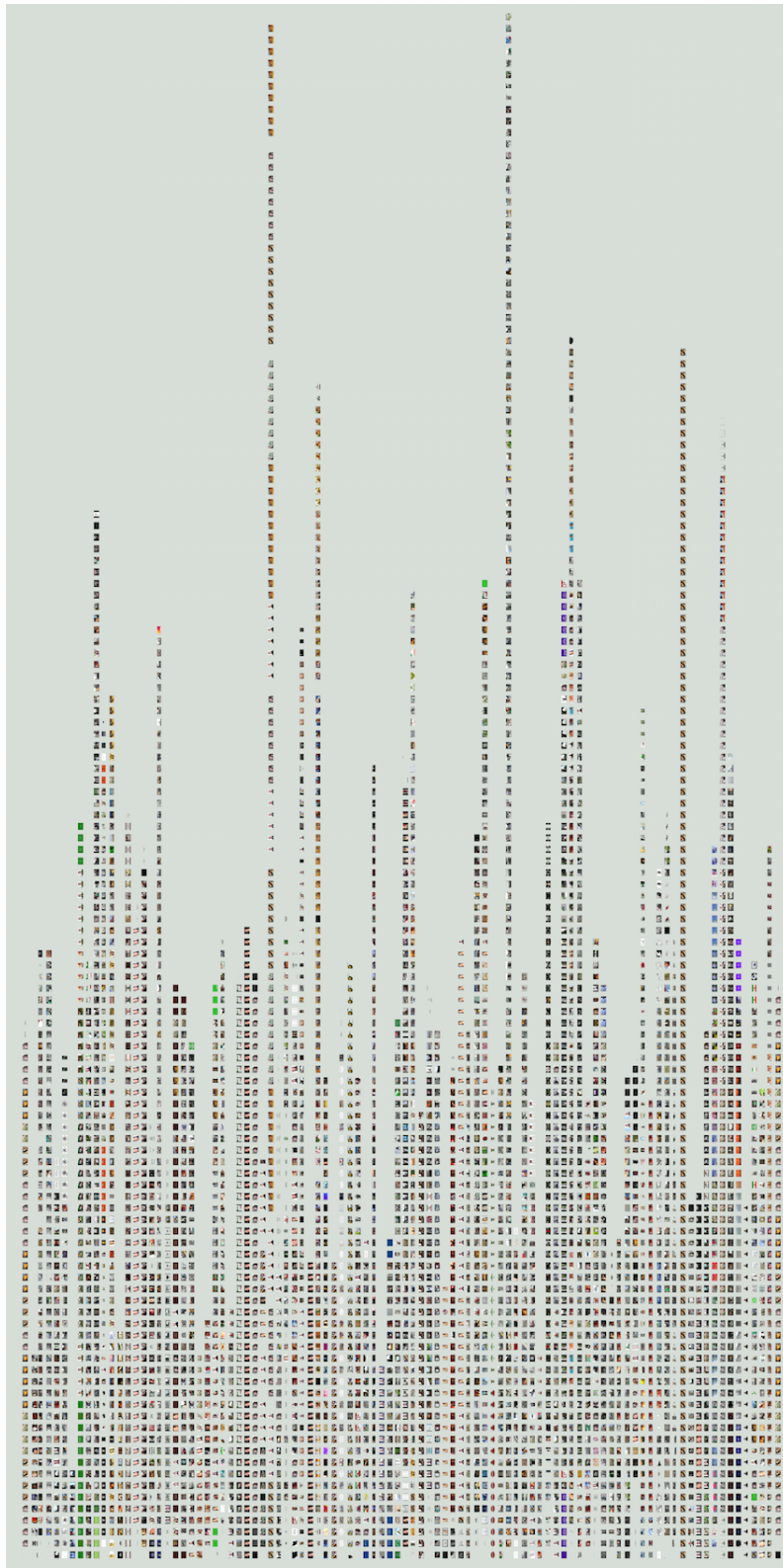
	<p>A 23-year-old and a 22-year-old, both from Bristol, were held under the Public Order Act on suspicion of inciting racial or religious hatred.</p> <p>A spontaneous shrine appears in Woolwich at the site of the attack.</p> <p>Hundreds of bunches of flowers, children's toys, cards, poems, balloons and other tributes are left on the street and at the barracks where Rigby was based. The railings of the barracks are adorned with flags of military units showing solidarity.</p>
19:17	<p>YouTube user Luite Luberts posts a video titled 'Conquering Heroes: Tribute for Lee Rigby', in what is thought to be the first tribute to the victim. It uses no footage from the attacks and no images of Rigby himself, instead focusing on his military background and celebrating soldiers in general.</p>
24-May-13	By the end of the day, half a dozen more tributes have been posted.
25-May-13	Tributes continue to be posted to YouTube. By now, they begin to contain images of Rigby culled from media reports and social media sites.
26-May-13	Eleven arrests reported over 'racist or anti-religious' comments on social media concerning the death of Lee Rigby.
27-May-13	Petrol bombs are thrown at a mosque in Grimsby, in the North East of the UK.
31-May-13	<p>A spate of anti-Muslim incidents are reported across the UK. The campaign group Hope Not Hate report 193 Islamophobic incidents since the attack.</p> <p>The government-funded group Tell MAMA reported 212 incidents, 125 of which were online, 17 were physical, and 17 were attacks on mosques.</p>
01-Jun-13	An inquest into the killing was opened at Southwark Crown Court.
07-Jun-13	Ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair writes that 'there is a problem with Islam' proven by the murder of Lee Rigby in an article in the <i>Mail on Sunday</i> .
07-Jun-13	A 21-year-old woman from Harrow arrested and charged for Tweeting that people in Help For Heroes T-Shirts 'deserve to be beheaded.'
12-Jul-13	<p>Rigby is buried in a full military funeral at Bury Parish Church. The service has an attendance in the thousands, which included David Cameron and London mayor Boris Johnson.</p>
27-Sep-13	The attackers appear in court and plead not guilty to murder.
29-Nov-13	The trial begins at the Old Bailey, London.
19-Dec-13	Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale are found guilty of the murder of Lee Rigby.
26-Feb-14	<p>Adebolajo sentenced to a whole life order without the possibility of parole.</p> <p>Adebowale sentenced to a minimum of 45 years in prison.</p>
08-Apr-14	Adebolajo denied permission to appeal his sentence.
25-Nov-14	<p>A British parliamentary enquiry into the killings published its report, concluding the attack could not have been prevented despite the intelligence services having records of Adebowale discussing the murder of a soldier on Facebook in December 2012.</p> <p>It came to light that Adebowale had had seven separate Facebook accounts blocked due to extremist content, although specific details were limited because this was an automated process, and as such there was no human knowledge of the accounts.</p>
03-Dec-14	Both men lose legal challenges to their sentences.

Appendix D

Visual corpus summaries

Visualisation D.1 shows all 5,042 static images taken from the Neda video corpus, plotted in sequence and per video.

Visualisation D.2 shows all 1,632 static images taken from the Rigby video corpus, plotted in sequence and per video.



The table is a large, dense grid of data. It features multiple columns and rows, with cells containing various symbols, numbers, and text. The data is organized into several distinct sections, with some rows highlighted in different colors (orange, green, blue). The table appears to be a complex dataset or a summary of visual information, possibly related to a specific domain or project.

Figure D.1: Full visual corpus, Neda

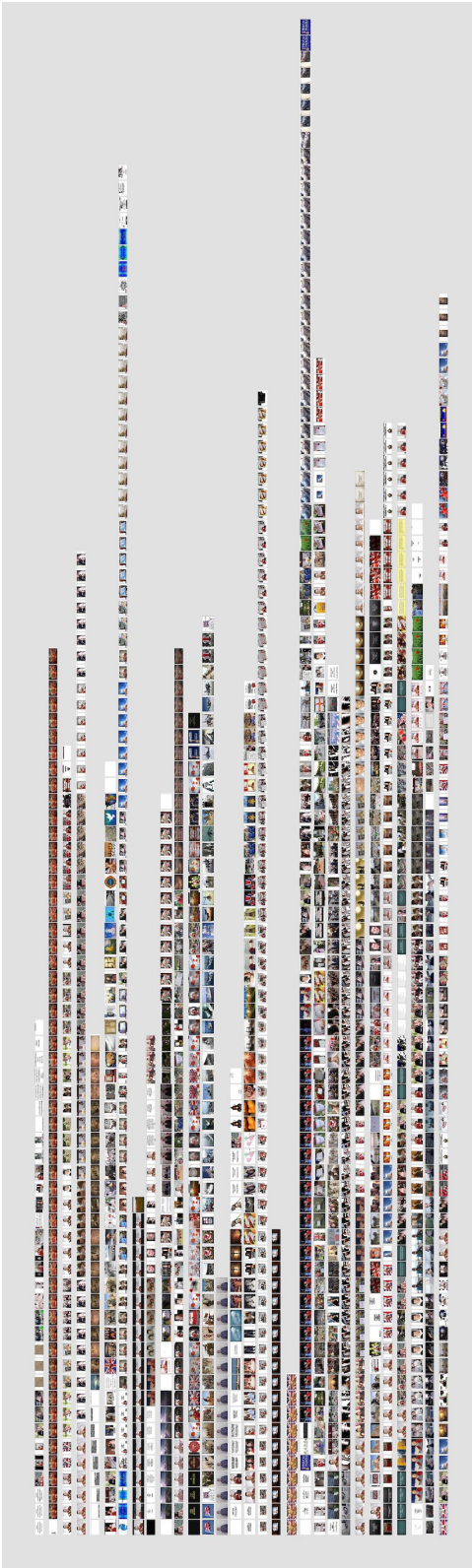


Figure D.2: Full visual corpus, Rigby

Appendix E

Death ritual typology chart

Table E.1: Death ritual typology table

	FUNERAL RITUAL	PUBLIC MEMORIALS	MEDIA EVENT MEMORIALISING	ONLINE MEMORIAL SITES	SMM
<i>Ritual action</i>	Patterned, scripted, formulaic	Patterned, ceremonial, repetitive	Patterned and mediated, repetition	Formulaic but open to personalisation	Diverse but iterative, unscripted, freeform, limited only by platform affordances
<i>Ritual place</i>	Preordained, officiated, sacrality of space is continuous	Public space appropriated, creates temporary sacred space	Abstracted: TV, radio, press	Online sites, hyperlinked to social media	Collapse of space, grounded offline
<i>Ritual time</i>	Strict cultural norms, closed	Anniversaries of varying scale	Temporary but extensive	Open, orientated to moment of death	Collapse of time: continuous and open
<i>Ritual objects</i>	Limited, closed, with strict norms	Established forms, national symbols and icons	Contextual, national symbols, biographical imagery	The page itself; virtual objects, highly stylised	Multifarious, fluid, unstable, collaborative, user generated
<i>Ritual parti- cipants</i>	Closed, predetermined by social status	Official society, local public, tourists, visitors	Journalists, amateurs, official society	Small-world groupings	Open, inclusive, inviting participation
<i>Figures and roles</i>	Ritual specialists, religious authority, mourners	Heroes, victims, witnesses, enemy	Heroes, victims, witnesses, perpetrators, commentators	Curator, close family close friends; Comments for visitors	Open, non-hierarchical
<i>Qualities and quant- ities</i>	Small, close, personal	Localised except on national occasions	Massive, interruption of schedule to flood circulation	Generally small and personal	Massive scale, organic, fluctuating, unstable
<i>Language and sound</i>	Ancient, traditional, sacred texts (some of the most unchanging scripts)	Military, traditional, contemporary, political	Hyperbolic, mythologising, high rhetoric, Sounds from live scenes	Respectful, sombre but informal, repetitive, uncontentious, embedded files	Varied, unpredictable, conflictual, antagonistic, and/or highly politicised, remediated content
<i>Emotions</i>	Restrained, controlled, personal	Formulaic, predictable, scripted, consensual	Amplified, affected, performative	Respectful, consolatory, supportive, controlled	Intense, raw, unchecked, challenging, affirmatory

Appendix F

Visual coding frames: Neda

Table F.1: Visual coding: Neda

Code	Theme	Count	%		
Neda: Life	Victim	534	10.59%	34.18%	
Neda: Death		614	12.18%		
Neda: Sacralised		485	9.62%		
Neda: Grave		990	1.79%		
Performance	Action of others	292	5.79%	34.3%	
Protest		685	13.59%		
Violence		686	13.61%		
Grieving		66	1.31%		
Nature	Virtual shrines	119	2.36%	10.81%	16.92%
Candles		211	4.19%		
Flowers		67	1.33%		
Religious		148	2.94%		
Hands	Local frames	110	2.18%	6.11%	
Iran		78	1.55%		
Regime		23	0.46%		
Iranian women		97	1.92%		
Text: Credit	Functional	78	1.55%	9.64%%	
Text: Narrative		279	5.53%		
Black screen		129	2.56%		
Other		250	4.96%	4.96%	
Total		5,041	100.00%	100.00%	

Appendix G

Visual coding frames: Rigby

Table G.1: Visual coding: Rigby

Code	Theme	Count	%		
Rigby: uniformed	Victim	323	20.77%	35.44%	
Rigby: family		215	13.83%		
Rigby: death scene		13	0.84%		
War	Conflict	33	2.12%	10.23%	20.65%
Soldiers		115	7.4%		
Perpetrators (Islam)	Action of others	11	0.71%		
Memorialising	Remembrance	86	5.53%		
Performance		76	4.89%		
Candles	Virtual shrines	43	2.77%	13.51%	26.63%
Flowers		127	8.17%		
Graves		21	1.35%		
Angels	Symbolic imagery	7	0.45%	13.12%	
Nature		12	0.77%		
Christ	Local frames	24	1.54%		
Church		16	1.03%		
Poppies		49	3.15%		
Flags		115	7.4%		
Text: eulogy/dedication	Functional	98	6.3%		
Text: appeal		8	0.51%		
Text: credits		221	1.35%	11.15%	
Text: narrative		12	1.77%		
Black screen		19	1.22%		
Other		105	6.75%	6.75%	
Total		1,555	100.00%	100.00%	

Appendix H

Translated songs and poems

Video 13: Abhar-22 khordad Neda Soltan, SOHRAB ARABI, SEYED ALI MOUSAVI HEROES OF ASHURA. Posted 26/06/09, 03:45:55, GreenArchitecture

AT FIVE IN THE AFTERNOON

It was exactly five in the afternoon.

A boy brought the white sheet, at five in the afternoon.

A frail of lime ready prepared, at five in the afternoon.

The rest was death, and death alone, at five in the afternoon.

The wind carried away the cottonwood, at five in the afternoon.

And the oxide scattered crystal and nickel, at five in the afternoon.

Now the dove and the leopard wrestle, at five in the afternoon.

And a thigh with a desolated horn, at five in the afternoon.

The bass-string struck up, at five in the afternoon.

Arsenic bells and smoke, at five in the afternoon.

Groups of silence in the corners, at five in the afternoon.

And the bull alone with a high heart! At five in the afternoon.

When the sweat of snow was coming, at five in the afternoon,

when the bull ring was covered with iodine, at five in the afternoon.

Death laid eggs in the wound, at five in the afternoon.

At five in the afternoon, at five o'clock in the afternoon.

A coffin on wheels is his bed, at five in the afternoon.

Bones and flutes resound in his ears, at five in the afternoon.

Now the bull was bellowing through his forehead, at five in the afternoon.

The room was iridescent with agony, at five in the afternoon.

In the distance the gangrene now comes, at five in the afternoon.

Horn of the lily through green groins, at five in the afternoon.
 The wounds were burning like suns, at five in the afternoon.
 At five in the afternoon, ah, that fatal five in the afternoon!
 It was five by all the clocks! It was five in the shade of the afternoon!

Video 19: For Neda. Posted 08/07/09, 05:22:30, tehrangeles1974

THE ICE FLOWER
 The sadness has made a nest in your beautiful eyes (it's always there)
 The night has made a home in your black hair
 Your two black eyes are like my nights
 The blackness of your two eyes is like my sadness
 When the spite comes down off my eyelashes, it becomes a rain
 The sadness like a flood has ruined my improvements
 When you stay with me, the wind takes my loneliness
 My two eyes have rained in the night
 The spring flew out of my hands
 The ice flower is grown in my heart
 I'm too alone in my room
 Oh' the one who has blossomed in this age
 How can I sing, my youth has gone
 And my voice has gone (I have no more the youth and the voice to sing)
 The ice flower is grown in my heart

Video 23: In Memory of Neda Agha Soltan - 1. Posted 03/07/09, 13:41:30, Bahman Sharif

THIS IS A STRANGE TIME, MY DEAR
 They smell your mouth to make sure you have not said, I love you.
 They smell your heart
 This is a strange time, my dear
 Do not risk thinking
 This is a strange time, my dear
 The one who knocking at door at night, has come to kill the light
 We have to hide the light in the closet
 Now, here are the butchers stationed at each crossroad
 With tree trunks and cleavers, dripping of blood
 This is a strange time, my dear
 Surgically, they put a smile on the lips and a song in the mouth

We have to hide joy in the closet
 Canaries roast on the fire of lilies and lilacs
 This is a strange time, my dear
 The devil, drunk with victory
 Celebrates our mourning at his table
 We have to hide God in the closet

Video 17: Death of Neda Agha Soltan. Posted 14/06/13, 02:52:06, ThePersianworld

Video 25: In Memory of Neda Agha Soltan:Shahin Najafi. Posted 01/03/14, 14:07:02, MoHo K

Video 32: Iran - Neda - Shahin Najafi For Neda. Posted 25/06/09, 07:57:05, am0okaveh

One morning, she sees her image, in the mirror, lifeless, one who hadn't lived but was only breathing; she turns on the TV, how is it possible?
 Streets are flooded with people, men and women, young and old, demanding their vote, time had arrived for justice, it was injustice that was bound to go.
 Her mother's warning, have all these deaths brought us any change? What happened to those in prison? Does anyone know their pain or bother to ask their name?
 Nothing will change. Demanding your rights? It's only mentioned in books, all is vain.
 But Neda hears a calling, the streets are roaring: This is your day Neda, the day they'll celebrate your wedding, the day you conceive the Messiah of Death, Virgin Neda,
 Amir Abad is thirsty for your blood, the groom is the bullets, the bridal chamber your casket.
 God, see how your sanctity's broken? Your Virgin Mary's shot, these savages are ruling. God, see how worthless human lives are? What were you trying to say by your gaze Neda?
 I will not silence my voice Neda, your blood runs through every alley, every street's marked by your blood. Sleep!
 Close your eyes, you no longer have to fear tomorrows, sleep for as long as we are awake we will echo your name in the streets. Take your hands off her chest, no! She will not stop bleeding!
 This blood has been gushing out for a thousand years, this is not Neda's blood, this is the Blood of Iran, our lonely land, the land without a coffin.
 The land that exiled us, with its self-resenting rulers, how can they show Neda mercy? I don't rely on ifs and maybes anymore, I will demand my rights, justice is here to say,
 it's injustice that's bound to go, and until our rights are given, this uproar will continue day and night.

Video: Neda Agha Soltan - Payame Neda Poem - Iran Poetry Poetry.
Posted 26/07/09, 11:58:44, IranBrave

NEDA'S MESSAGE

My eyes beckoned and you would not forget that look, I looked at you for
 the very last time

And with that last look, I told you everything

My eyes beckoned and you would not forget that look

My eyes tell of a thousand mothers' heartache

My eyes tell of pain and sorrow of the poor and needy

My eyes tell of the moaning of starving parched children

My eyes tell of young hearts that are tired of longing for the impossible

My eyes tell of that many sorrows of this time

My eyes tell of the heaviness of prison shackles

My eyes tell of the darkness of wailing nights

My eyes tell of the fear that resides at the bottom of a well

My eyes tell of the an unnameable loneliness

My eyes tell of the bitter taste of accusation and disrespect

My eyes tell of the utter disappointment of disloyalty

My eyes tell of the fear of hopelessness

My eyes tell of the anger toward the genocide

My eyes tell of mothers' broken hearts

My eyes tell of our constant fear of Evin prison

My last gaze was a plea to the brave and courageous, that our honour and
 love are heading to the grave

My last gaze was an inner love poem

My last gaze was the blossom of the freedom day, and it was a greeting
 to an eternal song

I looked at you for the very last time, and with that last look, I told you
 everything

My eyes beckoned and you would not forget that look, and you would
 remember my message

I am your Iran, look at me; I am your Iran, rolling in blood

I am your Iran, I am innocent; I am your Iran, knotted in pain

Hear my wailing, I am innocent; come and hold my hands, as I am weak

Give me a refuge; I have no place to go; save me, I'm dying in a sea of
 blood

But my look is also a question, a question with no answer

Why did you do this to me? Why did you destroy my life?

Why did you drench my love in blood? Why did you destroy my beloved
 country?

Why have you chosen brutality and oppression? Why are you against
 your own people?
 Why in your heart, is there no compassion? Why don't you love your own
 country?
 Is your heart made of cold dark stone? Is your faith built of beasts?
 You said your path was the oath of divine justice; never have we seen
 oppression as brutal as this
 Never have we seen any people as low as this
 No longer do I believe in your God, no longer do I want your holy book,
 and no longer do I want to see your face
 Now I depart, leave all my friends behind, as I can no longer tolerant your
 brutality
 If my life has been taken, my message will live forever
 If you have read what was in my eyes, if you have understood what my
 message was,
 Answer my call, give voice to my voice, answer my call.

Video 62: Neda Soltan allsolmusic. Posted 23/06/09, 05:52:43, All-SolMusic Page

THE LAST LETTER
 You're sleeping without hearing any stories or lullabies; sleep without any
 pain or sorrow
 You won't have any nightmares about winter any more, and you won't
 have any regrets in your sleep
 The sun can't burn your face any more, and the wind can't hit your face
 again
 You won't be awake with your worries any more, and you won't have any
 doubts to stay or leave
 You went and left the humans behind; you disobeyed the rules of the
 jungle
 The hearts are not kind here, that's why you couldn't stay here (in the
 jungle)
 You took your heart to somewhere else, where God tells you a lullaby
 I know I will see you again one day, in a world without humans.

Video 80: Siavash Official Video-Neda. Posted 28/06/09, 02:05:13, Siavash Shams

I AM NEDA
 You were innocent
 You were virtuous

You had a child-like soul
 You left us too soon
 Pledge to love he who killed Neda, for he did not know anything about
 love
 With your last look,
 My tears lost their belief for freedom
 I am talking with God
 Why did nobody call you?
 You left us and our hearts are broken because of your last look
 Blood turned into butterflies and sat on the tulip of belief.
 Your torch becomes the light that leads our world.
 Love, freedom and the sun in our tomorrow.

Video 81: SONG FOR NEDA original music by Greg V. in honor of Neda Agha Soltan. Posted 26/06/09, 06:17:45, grumpelina

I said I long for thee, you said your sorrows will end
 Be my moon, rise up for me, only if it will ascend
 I said, from lovers learn, how with compassion burn
 Beauties, you said in return, such common tricks transcend
 Your visions I will oppose, my mind's paths I will close
 You said this night-farer knows, another way will descend
 With the fragrance of your hair, I'm lost in my world's affair
 You said, if you care, you dare; on its guidance I can depend
 I said hail to that fresh air, that the morning breeze may share
 Cool is that breeze, you declare, with beloved's air may blend
 I said, your sweet and red wine, granted no wishes of mine
 You said, in service define your life, and your time spend
 I said when will your kind heart, thoughts of friendship start?
 You said speak not of this art, until it's time for that trend
 I said happiness and joy passing time will destroy
 You said Hafiz, silence employ, sorrows too will end my friend.

Video 85. The Pledge (Sogand) Poem NEDA - Iran Iranian Poet Poetry. Posted 09/07/09, 05:15:43, IranBrave

Pledge to your gaze, to your beautiful gaze, to your last heartbreaking
 gaze, to the light of your innocent eyes, to your black lover eyes, to
 your pain, groan, cry and whimper, witnessed by people in your land
 and other lands; those who knew you, and those who did not; all the

city for the story of your sorrowful departure, your bloody slaughter and perish.

Pledge to your innocent soul, to your honour, and to your grace, to your beautiful face, to your sweet essence; so many prayers to mourn you, so many kisses for your innocent whimpers, to give our heart and life for your causes, to restore justice in your memory.

Pledge to your innocent sweetness, pledge to your powerful call, all the angels saddened to mourn for you, all people in our world saddened to mourn for you; pledge to your mother's aching heart, pledge to your father's excruciating pain, to your early perish, to the redness of your spilled blood, to uproot injustice in your name, to restore justice in your memory.

Pledge to your defenceless chest, pledge to your departure without your chance of saying goodbye; we shall hear your voice for eternity, we shall keep the flame of your memory in our chests, where the treasure of your legendary love shall reside and it shall guard your land and people.

Pledge that you are in my soul, you are my leader, you are the call, the call of roar, you are my call and my roar, you are the pride of my dawn; you are the whisper of my conscience, you are the light of my conviction, you are that place, from which, the sun of my future will rise.

**Video 90: Tribute to Neda Iranian girl shot dead in tehran - Poem.
Posted 22/06/09, 19:50:00, Daniel Riahi**

In the name of who created us in freedom

Dear Neda, we saw the steps you took towards freedom

We saw your closed mouth that portrayed a thousand words

We saw your opened eyes in the last moment of your life, which gazed upon this life

Yes, our beautiful Neda, the world heard your silenced voice

And you flew away with your white and innocent wings.

**Video 96: "Neda" new song pesare bad. Posted 23/06/09, 19:31:56,
pesarel3ad**

Sleep my sister, sleep my Neda,

Sleep the free angel of home

Your innocent soul will fly and scream freedom

Sleep calm, sleep my sister, sleep my Neda,

Sleep the free angel of home

Sleep my Neda, sleep sister,

Sleep the free angel of home

We are talk but you are an action,
we just act but you are an effect
You are gone but your memories will last forever
Your innocent soul will fly and scream freedom
Sleep calm, sleep my sister, sleep my Neda,
Sleep the free angel of home
Your innocent look made a fire in my heart
Look! What your eyes have done to me that even my pen is crying
Iran is full with your blood
So sleep calm my sister, sleep my sister sleep my Neda,
Sleep the free angel of home

Appendix I

YouTube corpus Neda

All data accessed Accessed 20 July 2015. Video id's convert to URLs as per <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXnaHh40xnM>

Title	YouTube id	Date published	Time	UserName	Views	Comments	Likes	Disl.	Fav.
01 song for neda	OtXp-rcf5VU	23/06/09	20:23:23	eyvaldaneshjoo2	18,877	23	32	0	0
02 Hossein Zammam	2cW_p27tU6Y	20/06/14	23:21:00	Tribute2Freedom	2,400	2	23	0	0
03 Song for Neda	x7AciK3lApM	26/06/09	16:23:02	InterConnection Singer	4,462	9	19	1	0
04 #Neda	218Dth1uQ0M	24/06/09	19:52:02	willyr9	1,143	10	8	0	0
05 A Poem for Neda Agha-Soltan (Elections and Protest in Iran)	Nhi2w2joJ4c	29/06/09	06:22:51	chrisbarrett	10,287	13	62	0	0
06 A Prayer for Neda	BTdC6oqTSzw	26/06/09	20:49:00	Bill Lipner	534	2	1	0	0
07 A song for Neda and Neda by Ashraf city youth 26 June 2009	qAN_gaJ6_cw	26/06/09	15:24:08	iraniscc	10,551	1	14	5	0

Title	YouTube id	Date published	Time	UserName	Views	Comments	Likes	Disl.	Fav.
08 A Song for Neda Soltan	0rxUEiaM_cE	02/07/09	22:06:28	dadadaddyoo	696	2	1	0	0
09 A Tribute to Neda Agha Soltan - Neda e IRAN	azf54E3aH7o	28/06/09	12:02:06	APersianFather	310	2	4	0	0
10 A TRIBUTE TO NEDA SOLTAN WHO BECAME A MARTYR	VRhBy00gSyU	19/07/09	01:17:35	ArgonnePost	104	0	0	0	0
11 A Tribute to the Beautiful Neda Soltani ;(...	YuSsCRyU598	24/06/09	11:33:33	zoulation	893	4	9	2	0
12 A Video For Neda AghaSoltan!!!	VR0DqSxJyxc	23/06/09	02:59:08	bloodypunked	18,199	23	47	1	0
13 Abhar-22 khordad Neda Soltan, SOHRAB ARABI, SEYED	4VXBImk5mwU	26/06/09	03:45:55	GreenArchitecture	74,853	24	23	10	0
14 Anthem for Neda	_1T38HIKs44	10/07/09	09:06:17	1EAGardener	1,600	12	19	0	0
15 Bloodshed in Iran - - Sunday U2	boy2k8vbVWA	22/06/09	07:30:13	Smartsell Auckland	40,366	301	193	6	0
16 Daughter of the world (for Neda) by United GenerationS	Y8Aw4KfMNqU	30/06/09	19:02:44	o0ung0o	1,562	14	16	0	0
17 Death of Neda Agha-Soltan	q3cAJ6Q9QII	14/06/13	02:52:06	ThePersianworld	29,266	18	17	14	0
18 ehsan khaje amir salam akhar iran election 1388 Neda Agha	3nXxiKtco78	02/07/09	01:33:17	Nasim Hosseini	6,631	11	28	1	0
19 For Neda	73Iz5NH1zJA	08/07/09	05:22:30	tehrangeles1974	11,883	22	31	1	0
20 Freedom by Parfait -- In Memory of Neda Soltani	mO38GxdLcWE	23/06/09	03:34:42	parfaitakaleverbe	4,197	4	18	0	0
21 GRAPHIC Tribute to Iran uprising martyr Neda Aghasoltan	OAr_rmK8XII	18/05/11	18:17:04	FreedomMessenger3	172	0	1	0	0
22 In memory of Neda	c38tiN-TFqE	24/06/09	23:41:38	Gamboo28	477	0	4	0	0
23 in Memory of Neda Agha Soltan -1	jyBkaQ9FDtg	03/07/09	13:41:30	Bahman Sharif	743	1	4	1	0
24 IN MEMORY OF NEDA AGHA SOLTAN (SOLTANI)	jGu4V6kpTYM	24/06/09	11:16:58	tiami20	11,760	6	26	3	0
25 In memory of Neda Agha Soltan Song;Shahin Najafi	bwSHIZs4k	01/03/14	14:07:02	MoHo K	77,166	51	590	63	0
26 In Memory of Neda Agha Soltan Symbol of Iran's Democratic	uh8h4D2h0PQ	11/06/10	10:46:50	IranStudentsCommitte	1,808	7	4	0	0
27 In Memory of Neda Agha Soltan-Khab Aram	AnaPivqhrqE	25/01/10	20:13:48	persiangulfjournal	1,641	6	10	0	0
28 In memory of Neda Agha-Soltan	a3E_UZAzMjI	04/07/09	05:12:23	Rosa Roshan	8,72	1	5	0	0
29 In Memory of Neda Agha-Soltan - A Video Tribute	RtEL5yxYddw	23/06/09	07:26:40	TheSpiritOfTruth	8,168	17	17	1	0

Title	YouTube id	Date published	Time	UserName	Views	Comments	Likes	Disl.	Fav.
30 In memory of Neda Agha-Soltan "Voice of Iran"	IAY2ZbKvSB8	23/01/10	01:07:15	sherlock72	222	0	9	0	0
31 In Memory of Neda Soltan and other Martyrs of Freedom in Iran	tXypVBo9klY	22/06/09	05:29:19	76171300	17,494	21	29	1	0
32 Iran - Neda - Shahin Najafi For NEDA	H6GET9sNiSg	25/06/09	07:57:05	am0okaveh	69,789	50	221	7	0
33 Iran Election- A Tribute to Neda	OghLnZB27QE	22/06/09	07:29:21	Steven Whyte	17,354	52	104	8	0
34 Iran Graphic Neda An Angel Ameliorate	C65nzBcYBc0	23/10/10	07:45:06	Soltan FOG	18,202	4	12	9	0
35 IRAN PROTEST IMAGES IN TRIBUTE NEDA	yMJ48Oe3nRw	21/06/09	14:09:24	MeanStreak	254,813	711	583	35	0
36 Iran Protest Allah Allah song	cHvhH69nTbY	29/06/09	13:13:21	irangreenmovement	7,365	9	23	3	0
37 Iran's 'Angel of Freedom' Neda Soltan	z3DpXuK7cgQ	23/06/09	22:54:42	fortmyerscrazy	2,834	4	3	0	0
38 IRAN'S ANGEL OF FREEDOM - NEDA Agha Soltan	7c6HNXztvMM	24/07/09	08:12:34	Fereydon Abdollahyan	3,272	2	10	1	0
39 Iran's Neda (Shahrzad Sepanlou's vocals)	iK1I6BiY7TA	27/07/09	00:58:19	iraniangirl100	1,1675	8	66	3	0
40 NEDA - By Kawehi (WARNING- MATURE CONTENT)	k66S471J3as	16/01/13	20:16:38	I Am Kawehi	252,133	399	3,394	51	0
41 Neda - Hero of Iran - we will never forget you !	7iLTRTm1Adg	22/06/09	17:16:22	IranPersiaKaveh	44,539	177	126	10	0
42 Neda - performed by 33 Years	93TiajwUldM	18/01/10	16:57:21	33Years	2120	8	28	0	0
43 neda - Chris De Burgh - Liberty	X8syaiJhzRI	24/06/09	00:12:08	delreesh	3,060	7	15	0	0
44 Neda Agha soltan I have a dream	6xwOcBHi4qY	22/02/10	14:04:33	lucksinfei	372	2	3	0	0
45 Neda Agha Soltan	DjGFI'TDIHE4	22/06/09	09:18:17	mikemcpd	105,723	136	165	18	0
46 Neda Agha Soltan - Johhny dedicates a song to Neda	zbk5C1ono8	23/06/09	00:17:44	saeidkermanshah	1,529	3	22	0	0
47 Neda Soltan - Payame Neda Poem	Qf_4UzYB7K4	26/07/09	11:58:44	IranBrave	15,452	34	63	1	0
48 Neda Agha Soltan - We will never forget you.. we promise.	p-7Tgvo8iso	22/06/09	13:29:38	hootan2323	11,354	16	26	1	0
49 Neda Agha Soltan & other Angels of Freedom - a Dedication	X7CVqTk-r-c	24/06/09	14:23:21	SleepingGypsy8	2,247	9	15	1	0
50 Neda Agha Soltan 'Voice of Iran' - Rest In Peace	ya_Y3UflxHc	22/06/09	16:00:37	siggo121	8,956	19	41	6	0
51 Neda Agha Soltan Passport Photo	_RnR_U4okcs	22/06/09	02:00:47	iranprotest	24,316	80	133	11	0
52 NEDA AGHA SOLTAN tribute-Maula mere maula mere	x7RxxNfm7WM	22/06/09	06:28:33	blrstud84	44,661	40	30	18	0

Title	YouTube id	Date published	Time	UserName	Views	Comments	Likes	Disl.	Fav.
53 Neda Agha Soltan, killed 20.06.2009, Presidential Election Protest, Tehran, Iran	76W-0GVjNEc	22/06/09	22:38:48	AliJahanii	1,408,810	2,822	1,674	228	0
54 Neda Agha-Soltani Tribute Song _Neda of Freedom_	ZEgJ7RZN14E	30/06/09	00:22:08	sfriedmatube	2,199	3	7	0	0
55 Neda aghasoltan	Na1jW0ru8uY	23/06/09	02:36:40	aghasoltan	14,082	23	14	5	0
56 'Neda' Airborne toxic event	wXN_yCSbUYk	07/06/10	18:10:28	The Airborne Toxic Event	412,736	357	1,848	69	0
57 neda be shoma (1)	8xLZCM-9N7c	13/07/09	00:08:54	faribourz irani	914	2	4	1	0
58 Neda by Pardis Sabeti and Thousand Days	aIhCAibAjZo	06/08/11	20:09:53	onepro	20,978	15	129	6	0
59 Neda of Ashura	Mv9ehsW6PN8	25/12/09	22:20:00	AkkassBashi	24,323	16	48	0	0
60 Neda Soltain "the voice"" Killed Teran Iran Martyr	jOF9PFvvywI	23/06/09	18:23:52	kike ruvalcompositor	1,708	0	5	0	0
61 Neda Soltan (Angel Of Freedom)	XeWfCeud6IA	23/09/09	19:23:34	Sheldon Kahan	399	3	2	0	0
62 Neda Soltan allsolmusic	9J2bJeG_uF8	23/06/09	05:52:43	AllSolMuisic Page	127,465	255	292	10	0
63 Neda Soltan music & video tribute - 'Neda's Calling'	C_TBMfVp144	04/07/09	19:19:56	Armen Chakmakian	2,901	9	18	0	0
64 Neda Soltan shot down. In memory. Iran. Song-'The Call'	2jS0-wNpiOU	23/06/09	22:05:41	makiavelic	17,647	7	17	1	0
65 Neda soltan, The Iranian bright star (Setareye Roshan)	4hZ4fgtDUqw	26/06/09	04:35:08	GreenArchitecture	493	0	3	0	0
66 Neda Soltani - Iranian Revolution Martyr	qEuKiYT2RT4	23/06/09	20:03:51	Shambrall	23,244	22	37	3	0
67 Neda Soltani 'The Voice' killed in Tehran Iran	UfM9xv_f_Hg	24/06/09	02:28:58	Newsstube	6,255	8	6	1	
68 Neda Soltani the voice image photo picture girl shot killed Tehran Iran martyr	RUlglZPQsHk	23/06/09	18:04:48	ThePersianTalk	9,835	4	17	1	0
69 Neda ye Iran	bBiUaFKyPw8	21/06/09	09:16:01	OOCRI Iran	59,775	362	278	15	0
70 Neda's Call - Free Iran!!!	SI7G8rRiHYc	22/06/09	04:39:16	TheSpiritOfTruth	86,789	128	79	8	0
71 Neda's Eyes as sung by Sussan Deyhim	CPzEUe6NyHk	20/08/10	00:09:15	nedaseyes	28,573	19	157	11	0
72 Neda's Song	4DqppWIgeVM	24/06/09	23:37:34	billyseamusic	16,692	20	65	3	0
73 Neda's Song (Iran Be Free!) - Music Video Tribute To Neda	e11ILrgtUDo	04/08/13	17:12:53	The Kompozer	50,301	3	260	1	0
74 New photos of Neda Agha Soltan	98kVyeY-6Hk	24/06/09	09:23:48	iranprotest	126,799	128	195	14	0
75 R.I.P. Neda & all other irainian martyrs - k1shah	WJ6Ywv-eXpM	23/06/09	09:08:08	k1shahrap	3,283	5	34	2	0

Title	YouTube id	Date published	Time	UserName	Views	Comments	Likes	Disl.	Fav.
76 Requiem for Neda part 1	Wf0-gzQ9U8M	21/06/09	07:05:42	Tooraj Bakhtiari	18,506	27	42	2	0
77 Requiem for Neda (part 2)	EOIYIw8c9D4	24/06/09	09:08:59	Tooraj Bakhtiari	2,642	3	2	0	0
78 Rest In Peace - Neda Salehi Angel of Iran	FLNDUupnuyl	24/06/09	23:23:17	xSWEETxKAYx786x	6,056	5	15	1	0
79 RIP Neda Soltani, Neda! Don't Be Scared, Neda! Stay! Neda!	vig3qxFuKnY	22/06/09	02:55:29	RememberNeda	306,714	539	423	40	0
80 Siavash Official Video- NEDA	V-qavSPPyf8Og	28/06/09	02:05:13	Siavash Shams	56,094	53	215	11	0
81 Song for Neda	pYU48L9Dz7Y	26/06/09	06:17:45	grumpelina	2,071	18	32	0	0
82 SONG FOR NEDA original music by Greg V. In honor	yOzgFg2OPN4	25/06/09	13:37:16	GregVguitarist	45,428	56	135	5	0
83 Support Human Rights In Iran; Neda, Sohrab martyrs tribute	kDAyiKCMTQA	23/01/10	18:30:24	Leonard Kasra	4,906	6	12	0	0
84 The NEDA OF IRAN	59SPiO9kbT4	21/11/09	00:19:05	Freedom Messenger	994	1	11	0	0
85 The Pledge (Sogand) Poem NEDA Iran Iranian Poetry	Hc-Tka891VM	09/07/09	07:15:43	IranBrave	18,923	50	75	0	0
86 TRABOINI- NEDA SOLTAN (1982-2009) ® Pantheon HD	dHV7oEDV_0k	26/06/09	05:10:16	Kolec Traboini	940	2	4	0	0
87 tribute to all brave Iranian women-Neda agha soltan	bA1vRE4JrOk	12/07/09	21:06:07	TheQwert2000	34,377	1	68	9	0
88 Tribute to all Iranian Lioness	e0Z8YygoRLo	03/07/09	20:55:26	OOCRI Iran	3,807	5	26	2	0
89 Tribute to Neda Agha-Soltan ('The Voice')	7oDWwRcBU8M	22/06/09	08:17:51	Iman Huschmand	27,946	47	51	5	0
90 Tribute to Neda Iranian girl shot dead in Tehran Iran - Poem	F_jBeoNJ9pg	22/06/09	19:50:00	Daniel Riahi	62,590	63	26	5	0
91 Tribute to Neda, Daughter of Persia	hshuu-C3X8s	22/06/09	09:50:42	GrandPersia	1,357	5	10	1	0
92 Tribute to the brave Iranian martyr Neda Agha Soltan	yHKWpr99C10	02/01/10	20:11:37	JigareTehroon	1,196	4	6	2	0
93 United For Neda -	AEWJQpSkCGA	03/07/09	00:13:49	azarbarzin	3,711	3	6	1	0
94 Voice of NEDA agha soltani	9guTS2YFrRg	12/06/13	04:58:09	Caspian Makan	5,429	6	44	4	0
95 A film about Neda Agha Soltan*	yd2BbRdT2x8	29/11/09	11:57:28	INAIrannewsagency	26,078	3	23	7	0
96 "Neda" new song pesare bad	WmNplRUsmbQ	23/06/09	19:31:56	pesarel3ad	,1476	0	5	0	0

*Translated from Farsi

Appendix J

YouTube corpus Rigby

All data accessed Accessed 8 January 2016. Video id's convert to URLs as per <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXnaHh40xnM>

Title	YouTube id	Date published	Time	Author UserName	Views	Comments	Likes	Disl.	Fav.
01 Lee Rigby , A tribute , Forever Young , God Bless	zgTX6yx85Lg	24/05/13	14:42	david1966dc	17,173	193	220	7	0
02 Yung'Gee - See You Again ft. joegarratt (Wiz Khalifa Cover)	ICShtL7L6Nw	11/05/15	21:02	Kenyon Management	58,053	180	1,034	32	0
03 Tribute to Lee Rigby	51zk0anktVc	24/05/13	22:48	AntRm1	7,652	29	155	8	0
04 Lee Rigby tribute	NzOoMkggeqY	31/05/13	20:52	Danielle Gregg	579	1	7	0	0
05 Tribute to Drummer Lee Rigby Music by The Soldiers	bCeNqv8LNvw	25/05/13	10:24	glamejm	630	5	9	0	0
06 DRUMMER LEE RIGBY Tribute	ATv_EYK2ZZY	01/06/13	16:44	Amanda lewis	286	0	2	0	0
07 Tribute to Drummer Lee Rigby 'Say A Prayer'	p0_WzXBaIrg	24/05/13	19:01	NextOfKinOfficial	7,005	31	74	1	0

Title	YouTube id	Date published	Time	Author UserName	Views	Comments	Likes	Disl.	Fav.
08 Tribute to Solider. (R.I.P Lee Rigby Drummer Boy) London Attack Rap.	r0ucW_job30	28/05/13	18:02	Luke Barnard	901	8	10	2	0
09 Songbird (A tribute to Heroes) RIP Lee Rigby AVAILABLE ON ITUNES!!!!!!!!!!	cDmOw2JP5Q0	27/05/13	02:52	carly adams	9,080	17	59	0	0
10 Lee Rigby Tribute	KXxMhhEiTXk	30/05/13	13:05	Hannah Taala	247	0	5	0	0
11 Lee Rigby Tribute 2013	jC4rr7uDhUU	25/05/13	12:38	john O'Hara	145	1	2	0	0
12 Lee Rigby tribute	L7RXk145edI	23/05/13	22:36	nbaravens	227	2	14	1	0
13 Drummer Lee Rigby R.I.P (Last Post Bugle Tribute)	=-OEKR-FyilQ	26/05/13	14:54	Camron Malik	712	5	10	0	0
14 Lee Rigby r.i.p. a tribute to a fallen soldier and hero	NjYzX6z5Ets	29/05/13	00:27	snadarc09	802	4	6	0	0
15 Sentinel - Father Give Me Strength (A Tribute to Lee Rigby)	bCMY8-82KXc	24/07/13	10:35	Reece BCA	767	0	2	0	0
16 Knights Templar - Lee Rigby Tribute	o6N4DcQWo0w	25/05/13	14:18	TemplarReturn	581	5	12	1	0
17 A Street in Woolwich- A Tribute to Lee Rigby	Lqmb_kVhyA	26/05/13	11:04	Sue Rivers	130	0	1	0	0
18 Conquering Heroes - Tribute for Lee Rigby	zyrp-BHI_MQ	23/05/13	19:12	Luite Lubberts	1,525	9	13	0	0
19 lisaeastbelfast tribute to lee rigby	HEYwr_mJq_I	21/07/13	19:11	John Williamson	9,657	12	113	6	0
20 Woolwich attack- Lee Rigby a small tribute to a Solider & Drummer murdered 22 May 2013	S_ffPD1kEeo	25/05/13	21:13	William Lennie	1,364	1	8	1	0
21 Tribute video R.I.P Lee Rigby Gone But never forgotten	gjWNYsGTNko	23/05/13	22:14	gagetman100	889	15	15	0	0
22 Tribute to Drummer Lee Rigby - An English Hero	848BaHqwlx8	27/05/13	22:55	mgray88100	1,260	0	10	0	0
23 lee rigby memorial	4k_gq4gTFHQ	24/05/13	00:53	Herbie Jackson	226	0	3	0	0
24 In Memory of Drummer Lee Rigby ... Say Goodbye (Help For Heroes)	F6ghfFtom9M	29/05/13	22:52	Remembrance2011	4,406	20	35	1	0
25 one of us in memory of lee rigby-no need for war	EkgatkPPURU	15/11/13	01:28	Danny K R I S T	367	0	5	0	0
26 In Loving Memory Of Lee Rigby. OUR SOLDIER.	S1yDJ-PW0MA	08/06/13	19:34	Terrace Culture Clothing	297	0	3	0	0
27 Lee Rigby Hero	=-K_dF1McRr8	29/05/13	22:28	John Mcblain	2,287	17	34	2	0
28 Drummer Lee Rigby - Matthew Hewitt - Hero (In Memory) HELP THE HEROES	P4iOrLnjuw	27/05/13	00:15	matthew hewitt	908	3	13	0	0

Title	YouTube id	Date published	Time	Author UserName	Views	Comments	Likes	Disl.	Fav.
29 Lee Rigby of 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	aGDAAu4m65Q	24/05/13	00:14	TheSaintDesigns	1,704	12	27	1	0
30 Jamie Lee Morley (Pass It On) A Tribute To Lee Rigby #Pray #LeeRigby #OurHero (Download from iTunes)	hJzfnFvtEiQ	24/05/13	01:35	Jamie Lee Morley	3,101	5	19	3	0

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